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# Speeding up Shakespeare



# Speeding up Shakespeare.

STUDIES OF THE  
BYGONE THEATRE AND DRAMA

BY

W. J. LAWRENCE

Author of "*Those Nut-cracking Elizabethans*"  
"*Shakespeare's Workshop*" "*Old Theatre Days*  
*and Ways*," etc. etc.



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To  
HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER



## PREFACE

At the risk, after my former leavetaking, of being compared to Prior's thief, who, when at Tyburn,

Adjusted his halter, and traversed the cart,  
Full often took leave, yet was loth to depart,

I find myself irresistibly urged by the kindly welcome given to *Those Nut-Cracking Elizabethans* to issue a companion volume. The only excuse I can proffer is that one is loth that contributions to knowledge, the fruit of considerable labour, which have been given to the world in a painfully fugitive way, should disappear and leave no trace. Herein lies the *raison d'être* of this book, but by no means a full indication of the precise nature of its contents. It does not suffice to say that it is composed of a number of reprinted studies relative to the bygone drama and theatre. So far from being a matter of simple collection and transference, great pains have been taken to better what was already fairly good. Faults have been amended, points imperfectly discussed reconsidered, and many new facts and new truths advanced. In one or two cases, the revision has been so drastic that the studies concerned now

bear little or no resemblance to their originals. This applies in particular to the chapter on "The Origin of Bulls". Nonetheless I desire to express my heartiest thanks to the editors of the various journals in which the basic articles appeared for their courtesy in permitting me to reproduce them in whole or part. It is requisite therefore to acknowledge that originally and in their first form the first chapter in my book appeared in *The Criterion*, the second and third in *The London Mercury*, the fourth and fifth in *Life and Letters*, the sixth, seventh, and thirteenth in *The Stage*, the eighth and the eleventh in *The Times Literary Supplement*, the tenth in *The Irish Monthly*, and the twelfth in *The Dublin Magazine*. With the exception of the two Tarleton portraits, all the illustrations have been newly added. In this connection I beg to express a sense of deep indebtedness to the Right Hon. the Earl of Powis for his kindness in allowing me to reproduce Dobson's portrait of Sir Henry Herbert, one of the most valuable of his family heirlooms.

W. J. LAWRENCE.

October 1937.

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## Chapter I

### SPEEDING UP SHAKESPEARE

Reverence for our great heritage does much toward keeping the cream of Shakespeare on the boards, but his own unique plasticity does more. Age cannot stale nor custom wither his infinite variety, whether inherent or potential. Not all the efforts of the most freakish-minded or the least understanding of producers can wholly nullify his perennial appeal. It is largely due to his accommodating technique that every generation or so of playgoers gets the kind of Shakespeare it deserves. So far is he the touchstone of prevailing taste that for one to quarrel with the quality of current Shakespearean representation would be as good as moaning that the times were out of joint. In that respect, it is idle to do more than note the correlations. We are all now the helpless victims of a blind, mysterious force which insistently manifests itself in an insensate rage for speed for speed's sake, and there are few of our actions which are not in some measure influenced by that irresistible,

unreasoning urge. Not even in our hours of relaxation is there any freedom from that obsession. Shakespeare himself has undergone an undignified speeding-up.<sup>1</sup> Playgoers are being forced to bolt ambrosial food and are running grave risk of mental indigestion.

To do anything more than chronicle a patent fact would be merely kicking against the pricks. One cannot get rid of painful symptoms until one eradicates the disease. But, as it happens, on a not unimportant side-issue the full-armed theatrical antiquary has a right to be clamorous. Remonstrance on his part becomes legitimate and essential when, to bolster the new practice, an infectious fallacy is set well on foot. When the welkin rings with the cry that the reigning principle of acting Shakespeare all of a breath, so to speak, or with no more than a single break in the performance, has prime historical sanction, it is time for him to object. Although scholarship did not originate that thesis—it was first advanced about a quarter of a century ago by

<sup>1</sup> I cannot resist the temptation to quote the following from *The Evening Standard* of October 26, 1936:

“William Shakespeare was fined 20s. for speeding at Tower Bridge police court to-day.

“The court is near the site of the old Globe Theatre, where many of Shakespeare’s plays were first produced.”

that most purposeful of Shakespearean producers, William Poel, to whom must be otherwise credited divers wholesome reforms—still, scholarship has given it its blessing. By sheer force of iteration, surmise has been transmuted into certainty. The principle, as now practised, goes down, we are told, to bedrock, and upon that insecure foundation the new Cambridge Shakespeare has been based.

When, one wonders, will it be thoroughly grasped that the supreme broadcaster of the eternal verities was in nowise innovative, that his genius lay in the consummate bettering of other men's ideas? Few theories which seek to impose upon him individual principles of technique but carry their own condemnation. Anarchy did not rule in the Elizabethan theatre: the traffic of the stage could not be carried on without a certain universally recognised standardisation. There is little more than guesswork behind the idea of Shakespeare's amorphousness, yet we are confidently told that he never thought in acts or shaped his plays in them, and that consequently his plays were unbroken in performance. Against that pontification a few have protested, but not very convincingly, because, singularly enough, the most material evidence upon the point has

been utterly ignored. To repair that oversight, I purpose now putting William Shakespeare himself into the witness-box, feeling assured that, for once in a while, he will abide our questioning.

In the last quarter of the sixteenth century literary conceits were in the air, so much so that no dramatist of the time could escape from the necessity of juggling with words. The misfortune was that usage of the sort was apt to become second nature. An early master of this verbal legerdemain, Shakespeare never wholly succeeded in freeing himself from its tyranny, though in later life he made no response to its impish urgings at incongruous moments. (There are painful instances of the obsession in *Romeo and Juliet*.) One result of the practice was that for him many clear-cut words lost their definition, became chameleon-hued. When they came to mind they brought with them all their connotations. It is puzzling to the unsuspecting reader to find an apparently simple word not always used in the one simple sense.

Here we come to Hecuba. It is to be noted that Shakespeare most frequently uses the word "act" in the sense of deed or action, and yet rarely, if ever, without giving it some associated

theatrical colouring. As a rule, the passage in which it occurs smells of the tiring-house. Not that there is ever any deliberate punning on the word: the effect is much more delicately conveyed: it is one of subtle over-tones. The meaning is struck out clear on the anvil, but there are reverberations which suggest the playhouse connotation. Because of this peculiarity, sustained theatrical metaphor in Shakespeare is never wholly flawless. Look, for example, at a couplet from *Venus and Adonis*:

And all this dumb-play had his acts made plain  
With tears, which chorus-like her eyes did rain.

It is also to be noted that in Shakespearean metaphor, "scenes" and "acts" form quite a common collocation, though it is rare in such instances to find "acts" given its full theatrical meaning. Take the passage in the opening scene of *2 King Henry VI*, wherein Northumberland, on receiving the news of his son's death, bursts out with

Now, let not nature's hand  
Keep the wild flood confined: let order die:  
And let the world no longer be a stage  
To feed contention in a lingering act;

But let one spirit of the first-born Cain  
 Reign in all bosoms, that, each heart being set  
 On bloody courses, the rude scene may end  
 And darkness be the burier of the dead.

Here we have the anomaly of an elaborate theatrical trope in which neither “act” nor “scene” is used in its ordinary theatrical sense, for “act” simply means action and “scene”, stage. Elsewhere where the collocation is neater and more apparent, there is occasional play upon words but never a complete theatrical analogy. Thus, in *King John*, 1, 2, we get:

(They) stand securely on their battlements,  
 As in a theatre, whence they gape and point  
 At your industrious scenes and acts of death.

On this consecution the changes are deftly rung, again with the same lurking suggestiveness, in the second act of *King Richard III*, where the Duchess asks, “What means this scene of rude impatience?” and the Queen replies, “To make an act of tragic Violence”.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Either this particular trick of phrasing was derivative or another had it. In that anonymous play, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, as acted ca. 1592 and first printed in 1605, one encounters in sc. 16, l. 1232, the passage:

When will this Scene of sadness have an end,  
 And pleasant acts insue, to move delight?

Mr J. Middleton Murry, *Shakespeare*, p. 125, draws

Once in a long metaphorical speech replete with theatrical allusiveness, Shakespeare actually makes use of the word "act" in a sense diametrically opposed to its theatrical meaning. There has long been a unanimity of popular opinion to the effect that when the melancholy Jaques holds forth at length on the "All the world's a stage" theme, he is referring to the acts of a play when he says of man as a player, "His acts being seven ages". Apart from the fact that the Horatian rule still held good and that the regulation number of acts was five, a moment's reflection should convince anybody that the acts of a play are not the particular property of any player appearing in them, and cannot therefore be fittingly characterised as "his acts". The reference is to a player who acted a character assuming many disguises (such as Skink in the anonymous contemporary comedy, *Look About You*), each disguise forming a separate action. A perfect, if accidental, gloss upon Jaques' speech occurs in Dekker's tract, *The Bel-Man of London*, wherein we read in a passage dealing with the roguery of the times:

attention to the remarkable number of theatrical metaphors in *King Richard III*. Besides acts and scenes, they deal with inductions, cues, and the mannerisms of the deep tragedian.

The *Bernard* is the chiefe *Player*, for hee counterfets many parts in one and is now a drunken man, anon in another humour, and shifts himself into so many shapes, onely to blind the *Cozen*, and to feede him with more delight the more easily to beguile him.

It may safely be laid down as an axiom that only such theatrical metaphors were indulged in by the Elizabethan dramatist as could be readily understood by the great majority of people. Shakespeare's meaning is much less easy to grasp now than it was in the days when the complex-disguise play was in the enjoyment of a very considerable vogue.<sup>1</sup> In proof of the assertion that the five-act form was the Elizabethan rule, one may press into service the neat theatrical metaphor indulged in by Ben Jonson in *Bartholemew Fair*, act III, sc. 2, when Quarlous says, relative to the theft from Cokes:

We have had wonderful ill-luck, to miss this Prologue o' the Purse; but the best is, we shall have Five Acts of him ere Night; he'll be Spectacle enough, I'll answer for it.

Pretty good proof this that for some years before 1614, plays had been regularly acted in

<sup>1</sup> For early examples of this obsolete type of play, see my *Pre-Restoration Stage Studies*, chapter xii.

five acts, and (whether they were long or short) with four intervals.

But, if the word "act" in Jaques' grand aria is curiously shorn of its old Shakespearean overtone, we have not long to wait to hear again the familiar reverberations. Twice in *Hamlet* the insinuation recurs. It comes first just before the aborted performance of *The Mouse Trap*, where the expectant young prince tells Horatio:

There is a play to-night before the king;  
One scene of it comes near the circumstance  
Which I have told thee of my father's death:  
I prithee when thou seest that act afoot,  
Even with the very comment of thy soul  
Observe my uncle.

Again, the same old mental association of the familiar stage terms with the same imperfect analogy. It is not until we proceed to the close of the play that we get for the first time in Shakespeare a duplex conveyance of a straightforward type in the use of the word "act". As it is, the full theatrical colouring in the dying prince's phrasing of

You that look pale and tremble at this chance  
That are but mutes or audience to this act,

is apt to be lost sight of, so few nowadays are

aware that in the Elizabethan era a super was called a mute.

Shakespeare had the trick of a quasi-metaphorical suggestiveness, a proceeding half-way towards the attainment of a full-bodied trope which sometimes answers its purpose and sometimes makes for obscurity. He wrote to be heard, not to be studied, and there are things which pass muster in the hearing which prove sadly defective on perusal. Take the reflection of the new-made Thane of Cawdor:

Two truths are told,  
As happy Prologues to the swelling act  
Of the imperial theme.

If it be assumed that here a full theatrical allusiveness is intended, the expression of the idea is most infelicitous. Two prologues to an act make one more than any act of any Elizabethan play was, or, within the bounds of possibility, could have been, provided with. Yet Shakespeare has elsewhere afforded us grounds to believe that here he used "act" in a double sense. It is surely significant that in the prologue to *King Henry V* we get a reference to a "swelling scene":

A kingdom for a stage, princes to act  
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene.

The theatrical meaning in both cases may not be precisely the same, but that a secondary theatrical conveyance was intended in the passage cited from *Macbeth* can hardly be doubted. What Time says, as Chorus, in introducing the fourth act of *The Winter's Tale* makes the point clear:

. . . your patience this allowing,  
I turn my glass, and give my scene such growing  
As you had slept between.<sup>1</sup>

One notes that in the final scene of this play, the First Gentleman, in relating Pauline's welcoming of the long-lost Perdita, indulges in an incidental comment having a faint echo of Hamlet's dying appeal:

The dignity of this act was worth the audience of  
Kings and Princes, for by such was it acted.

Here, again, "act" has no shot-colouring, yet it fails to appear wholly monochromatic because of the compelling association of ideas. Remarkable, indeed, is Shakespeare's consistency on this score. One finds in the second act of *The Tempest* an involuted theatrical metaphor in which the word has the same characteristics. Antonio, in

<sup>1</sup> Gower's addresses in *Pericles* are not commonly taken as authentic Shakespeare, yet in the Chorus to act iv we get "Whom our fast-growing scene must find at Tarsus".

speaking to some of the survivors from the shipwreck concerning Claribel's right of succession to the throne of Naples, says:

. . . she that from whom  
We were all sea-swallowed, though some cast again,  
And by that destiny, to perform an act  
Wherein what's past is prologue, what to come  
Is yours and my discharge.

There is no deliberate playing here upon the word "act", but there is upon the word "cast", and the passage is noteworthy because it comprises one of the earliest allusions to the practice of cautiously distributing the parts in a play. It is also noteworthy because of the excellent use of it made by Mr Desmond MacCarthy in a review of Dr Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery*, published in *The Sunday Times*.<sup>1</sup> Quotation from this thought-breeding article is vital:

Dr Spurgeon has in effect applied chemical analysis to the "atmospheres" of various plays; and, incidentally, she has also brought home to me the fluid, spontaneous nature of Shakespeare's associative faculty, which is the distinctive mark also of his style. It was Mr E. E. Kellett who first pointed out, at any rate to me, in his excellent book of essays, *Suggestions* (Cambridge Press, 1923), the streamy

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<sup>1</sup> In its issue of October 13, 1935.

nature of Shakespeare's associations. His thought never seems to follow a line previously traced, but to be extemporary and to progress to its end by taking advantage of verbal suggestions on the way. Take the speech of Metellus in *Julius Caesar*, when he is advocating the inclusion of Cicero in the plot:

O, let us have him, for his *silver* hairs  
Will *purchase* us a good opinion.

(“Silver” suggested coin; coin, “purchase”.) Or, to take a more intricate example from *The Tempest*, [then follows the passage given above].

Here the word “cast”, meaning “cast up”, following after “swallowed”, instantly suggested the stage to him, and the word “act”, with its double meaning: in its turn suggested the theatrical terms “prologue” and “discharge”, which in those days meant “performance”. This streamy quality of his mind gave Shakespeare's style its felicitous facility, and, at great moments, a matchless homogeneity. His words modify each other more than those of other writers; they melt and blend together in so extraordinary a degree that a whole passage often has the unity of a single phrase. Hence his glory as a craftsman; hence, too, his obscurity and difficulty.

What has now been presented gives the whole of Shakespeare's testimony on the question at issue, and it remains to be seen what deductions can be honestly made from it. The task would be simple enough were it not for the awkward

circumstance that the great dramatist, when trope-hunting, now and again betrays a curious, often obscuring impatience. Should the quarry elude him at the outset he is apt to abandon the chase, or, mayhap, to start another hare. In either case, the onus is thrown upon the understanding, and, to complete the picture or visualise it in proper perspective, one must acquire the Elizabethan turn of mind. Once, however, Shakespeare's evidence is approached in the true spirit, two points clearly emerge, and these, when taken associatively, allow of but one conclusion. Whatever the reason for the evasion, it must be frankly admitted that Shakespeare time and again deliberately shirks giving the word "act", when used in its common everyday sense in the course of a metaphor, its metaphorical implication. But there is of a surety very considerable significance in the fact that the passages in which the word forms an integrant are so often, as we have seen, imbued with theatrical colouring. More significant still is Shakespeare's collocation of scenes and acts, and especially his occasional antithetic use of the terms. In these cases, it is impossible to argue otherwise than that there was deliberate allusiveness to the scenes and acts of a play.

Because of its inevitableness, this conclusion

reveals the incongruity of a commonly accepted opinion. We are confidently told that Shakespeare never wrote in acts, never was played during the period of his creative activity in acts. Yet, presumably, when trope-making, he would hardly have been disposed to utilise theatrical terms with which his own particular public was unfamiliar. What knowledge, then, could the vast mass of Elizabethan playgoers, most of them illiterate, have had of the nature of acts save by experiencing the waits between them while at the play? Before the meridian of James I's reign, play-reading, extensively as it was pursued, could give no help. Up to that period it was the fashion (with no more rationality behind it than fashion usually has) to publish plays without act-divisions; and from that fashion there were very few departures. It is wholly on the strength of this custom that the prevalent theory of the unbroken representation of Shakespeare's plays in Shakespeare's own time has been based. By a parity of reasoning the claim should be extended so as to include all the other public-theatre dramatists of the time, but as yet nobody has been rash enough to go the whole hog and reduce the proposition to absurdity. Jonson, for example, wrote for Shakespeare's company, but Jonson

sturdily refuses to be crushed into this hypothetical mould.

The main result of this politic partiality has been to constitute Shakespeare, dramaturgically speaking, a law unto himself, nothing short of a rank impossibility. For the convenience of the dramatist, the player, and the public alike certain conventions had to be universally recognised, else the traffic of the stage could not have been carried on.

Flouting all other considerations, I submit that by virtue of Shakespeare's own testimony we are compelled to conclude that Shakespeare's plays were written in the prescribed five acts, and acted in his own day with four intervals. Most likely the intervals were not of any particular duration, hardly more than pauses, but intervals of some kind there certainly were. It must be borne in mind, however, that performances in Elizabethan times were given in the afternoon by natural light and had to conclude well before supper-time, otherwise six o'clock—a limitation to three hours or thereabouts, which precluded leisurely progression,

## Chapter II

### ON THE UNDERRATED GENIUS OF DICK TARLETON

In all but a few cases—the fixed stars in Eternity's firmament—posthumous reputations of the notable dead are as variable as the winds. It is not to be expected that unorganised opinion, with nothing better to base upon but tradition, could invariably arrive at any just estimate of bygone celebrities. We are only just awaking to the fact that Richard III was not nearly as black as Shakespeare painted him. There are moments when one longs for the institution of some Higher Court of Appeal where the status of the memorable dead could be fixed irrevocably. How the varying haze of time can blur the outlines, flatten the colour, and eliminate the subtle tone-values of complex genius has never been better illustrated than in the case of Dick Tarleton, the Elizabethan clown. An ineffaceable stigma accompanies sundry labellings of the *genus homo*, and from this Tarleton's reputation has never recovered. Dub him "his clownship" and there

an end. His work as pioneer has been wholly forgotten. No player of his particular hour left so deep an impress on the drama and on theatrical art, and none so strongly influenced their future trend. A great Rabelaisian personality, his power lay in the fact that in his blunt, coarse humour, his cool assurance, and his bland outlook on life he was the common denominator and articulate expression of his free-spoken, devil-may-care age. It was pre-eminently an age of great adventure, and he, too, infected by the spirit of his times, voyaged intrepidly on uncharted seas.

Tarleton's fame as primal clown undoubtedly survives, but it is a truncated fame. In 1611, twenty-three years after his death, irreparable injury to his reputation as a wit was done by the publication of his so-called *Jests*, a more or less fraudulent catchpenny in which only the faintest glimmerings of his real qualities appear.<sup>1</sup> On the cooked evidence thus advanced has posterity

<sup>1</sup> Collier, *Hist. Dram. Poetry* (1876), III, 334, shows reasons for believing that the edition of 1611 was a later reprint, either added to or brought partly up to date. The *Jests* are mentioned in a tract of 1589, *Theses Martinianae*, wherein also incidental reference occurs to the capital made by the players out of the raging religious controversy. A second part of the *Jests* was evidently entered on the Stationers' Register in August 1600, but nothing issued earlier than 1611 has come down to us.

arrived at its verdict. Such, indeed, has been the lukewarm opinion formed of his powers that it is not at all surprising that few can bring themselves to believe that Dick was the “pleasant Willy” of Spenser’s *The Tears of the Muses*, and could possibly have been mourned by the fastidious poet thus:

And he, the man whom Nature selfe had made  
 To mock her selfe, and Truth to imitate  
 With kindly counter under mimic shade,  
 Our pleasant Willy, ahl is dead of late:  
 With whom all joy and jolly merriment  
 Is also deaded, and in dolour drent.

Other identifications have been proffered—Sir Philip Sidney, Llyl the dramatist, and who not, but none with equal plausibility.<sup>1</sup> One has only to acquaint oneself with Tarleton’s distinguishing physical characteristics to see that the first two lines actually convey his portrait. Nature, in rendering him abnormal, deformed, almost a dwarf, and at the same time endowing him with a caustic wit, had made him capable, in being as well as in doing, of mocking at her work. Much may be learnt in this connection from a perusal

<sup>1</sup> See *Notes and Queries*, 1885, 12 S. xi, 417, and xii, 323; Halliwell-Phillipps, *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*, 1907, II, 394; also the review of Bond’s *Llyl* in the *Athenaeum* of February 14, 1903.

of the *Jests* and by scrutinising the characteristic drawing by John Scottowe given in an initial letter to some elegiac verses on the clown preserved in one of the Harleian manuscripts in the British Museum.<sup>1</sup> The existence of no other portrait was known of until 1920, when I had the good fortune to discover a second one, which was duly published, together with the first draft of the present study in *The London Mercury* at that time. For the purpose of ready comparison, both are now reproduced.

The identification of the new portrait is a roundabout business. Preserved in *The Roxburgh Ballads* is an old ditty by Martin Parker called "The New Medley, or A Messe of All-together", sung to the tune of "Tarleton's Medley".<sup>2</sup> Like most late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century ballads, it has an accompanying woodcut, but one in this particular case which has no connection with the ballad save by an association of ideas. This gives no room for surprise. These quaint woodcuts were used again and again by the old printers, often without any relevancy. As a case in point, the cut of Doctor Faustus

<sup>1</sup> No. 3885, f. 19. As this was the original of the portrait given in the *Jests*, I have reckoned the two as one.

<sup>2</sup> Which tune was "The Spanish Pavan", given in Chappell's *Popular Music*, I, p. 240.



New Portrait of Richard Tarleton  
(From the old ballad, "The New Medley, or a Messe of All-together")



used to illustrate Marlowe's play and the Faustus ballad was used again in Caroline times to illustrate a ballad on the murder of Dr Lambe the astrologer. The cut to "The New Medley" shows four men seated at an ordinary with an odd-looking waiter in attendance. The waiter is Tarleton. Seeing that Parker's medley was to be sung to an old tune used by Tarleton for a similar hotch-potch, and that Tarleton himself once held an ordinary in Paternoster Row,<sup>1</sup> it seems rational to take this as his portrait and to conclude that the cut had formerly been made either for a Tarleton ballad or some ballad concerning him.

A comparison of the two portraits is essential. I anticipate the seemingly serious objection that whereas the Tarleton of the Scottowe drawing is bearded, the stunted figure I have identified as Tarleton is clean-shaven. But it will be time enough for me to seek a suitable answer when somebody explains how it came about that there is a similar discrepancy between the portrait of Shakespeare in the First Folio and the Stratford monument. Whatever the solution, it will prob-

<sup>1</sup> As two references in the *Jests* show. A curious analogy is afforded us by later times. In 1754, Charles Macklin, the actor, opened an ordinary in Hart Street, Covent Garden, and officiated as head waiter, always bringing in the first dish.

ably apply in both cases. It is to be noted that the two Tarleton portraits have one feature in common, and that despite the fact that in the one he is in stage, and in the other personal attire. Both men are wearing startops, otherwise boots reaching to the ankle and laced at the sides, or fastened with straps and buckles, as they are in the Scot-towe drawing. Startops were commonly worn by the yokels of the time, whose garb as clown Tarleton adopted. Reference is made to these facts in the verses accompanying the drawing:

When hee in pleasant wise  
The counterfet expreste  
Of clowne, with cote of russet hew  
And sturtups, with the reste.<sup>1</sup>

Now and again learned people are apt to write learned nonsense. We have been told—I pillory nobody, having as many ill-wishers as I desire—we have been told, forsooth, that Tarleton, because he wore flat shoes, was the lineal descendant of the *mimi planipedes* of ancient Rome and their successors, the medieval minstrels, but it is much too curious to consider so, and we

<sup>1</sup> For the entire elegy, see Edwin Nungezer, *A Dictionary of Actors*, p. 354, in and about which reference will be found the pithiest and best account of Tarleton yet penned.

have no need to go so far afield to explain his wearing of startops when a reason is so readily afforded us at home.

It is also to be remarked that in both portraits Tarleton is shown to have had curly hair, and the contrast in the new one between Tarleton's hair and the straight flowing locks of the four flat-capped merchants is very striking. Furthermore, in the new portrait Tarleton is represented as having a decided squint, and we know from the *Jests* that he had this peculiarity. It would appear, therefore, from the evidence to be culled from various sources, that the archetypal clown was a short, thick-set man, slightly hump-backed, with cross eyes and a comically flattened nose. If we are to believe a story told in the *Jests*, Tarleton got his nasal disfigurement through a temerarious intervention in a bear-and-dog fight; but George Daniel,<sup>1</sup> by way of accounting for his wife's well-known shrewishness, states, without quoting any authority, that it was an open secret in Tarleton's time that the misfortune came to him in another way—the way in which Sir William Davenant became a similar victim. When one thinks of Tarleton's physical handicaps and how he turned them to advantage, one

<sup>1</sup> *Merrie England in the Olden Time*, chapter xxx, note.

is reminded of Bacon's essay *Of Deformity*, and especially of where it is predicated of the deformed that "they will, if they be of spirit, seek to free themselves from scorn; which must be either by virtue or malice. And therefore let it not be marvelled, if sometimes they prove excellent persons".

There is interesting evidence to hand showing that, not long after Tarleton's death in September 1588, a ballad concerning him was issued bearing a portrait. There was published in 1590 (as it had doubtless been acted in 1589) a play by Robert Wilson, Tarleton's sometime colleague, entitled *The Pleasant and Stately Morall of the Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*, in which incidental tribute was generously paid to the great clown's memory. It came from the mouth of Simplicity, a pedlar of small wares, including ballads. The tribute is led up to by Will taking a ballad out of Simplicity's basket, and asking whom the picture on it represented. He is told Tarleton:

O, it was a fine fellow, as e'er was born:  
There will never come his like, while the earth can  
corn.

O, passing fine Tarlton! I would thou hadst  
lived yet.

To which Wealth, who is standing by, demurs with "There is no such fineness in the picture that I see". Simplicity replies:

Thou art no Cinque-Port man; thou art not wit-free.  
The fineness was within, for without he was plain;  
But it was the merriest fellow, and had such jests in  
store

That, if thou hadst seen him, thou wouldest have  
laughed thy heart sore.

One of the specified ballads in Simplicity's stock has come down to us, "Willie and Peggy", sung to the tune of "Tarlton's Carol".<sup>1</sup> This is virtually a lament for the death of Tarleton, and the fact that he is spoken of throughout as Willie:

But now he is dead and gone,  
Mine own sweet Willie is laid in his grave—

not only goes to substantiate the idea that Tarleton was Spenser's Willie, but might afford some grounds for believing that Willie had been Tarleton's nickname.

In the last quarter of the sixteenth century and in the quarter succeeding, plays were not, as they generally are now, ready-made goods awaiting a possible buyer. Rather did they resemble the

<sup>1</sup> Given in *The Shirburn Ballads*. Cf. C. R. Baskerville, *The Elizabethan Jig*, p. 100.

clothes worn by all self-respecting men in being made to order and to measure. It was the business of the Elizabethan dramatist to know the strength and weakness of the company for which he wrote, and, where possible, to give reality to his characters by endowing them with the physical peculiarities of the players for whom they were designed. (In France, later on, Molière, to some extent, adopted this practice. He had a lame actor in his company and wrote him "lame" parts.) So few of the characters originally sustained by Tarleton are known to us that, after recalling that in plays where he figured as clown there is likely to be some reference—even self-reference—to his distinguishing physical characteristics, one is inclined to hunt for traces of him in the goodly number of orphaned plays of his period, those plays of which the authorship is unknown and the antecedents doubtful. Several plays of this type were published within a few years of his death, and, since most of them contain clowns, it is remarkable that the clown is invariably represented as a wight of small stature. Not all these clowns can be even plausibly assigned to Tarleton, and it would look as if his immense vogue had set a fashion and that the primary qualification for the playing of clowns was short-

ness of height. The question really is, how many of the anonymously issued and otherwise unassigned plays printed early in the fifteen-nineties can be safely taken as productions of the Queen's Men during the five years, from 1583 to 1588, Tarleton was a principal member—perhaps the principal member—of the company? Very few perhaps, but I feel pretty certain that the long-popular *Mucedorus* is one of them. In the character of Mouse the clown—the very name postulates diminutiveness—we have not only a reflex of Tarleton's humour, but also a sly illusion to his nasal disfigurement:

*Segaste.* But dost thou know the man?

*Clown.* Ay, forsooth, he hath a nose on his face.

*Segaste.* Why, so hath every one.

*Clown.* That's more than I know.

One fancies one sees "Pleasant Willie" ruefully rubbing his apology for a nose as he utters this last line, and waits expectantly for the roar of laughter to follow. I should be inclined also to take him as the original Bullethrumble in *Selimus*, a Queen's Men's play published in 1594. Note that the character is that of a shepherd with a shrewish wife. In *Nobody and Somebody*, the clown was a rôle of some importance. Not only does he

bubble over with wit, but we find him on one occasion speaking of "faces otherwise than of God's own making", possibly a quaint personal allusion. Tom Miller in *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* strikes one as if fashioned in accord with Tarleton's particular brand of blunt humour, and as if measured for his height, since at one juncture we find him claiming:

For a bold captain I have the advantage of you all,  
For while you are fighting  
I can creep into a quart pot, I am so small.

So, too, that "petty pygmy", Piston, in *Soliman and Perseda* might well have been another part for which Tarleton was measured. Quizzical as it was because of the marked physical disparity between them, Piston's subdual of the boasting Basilisco would not have appeared absurd in Elizabethan eyes had Tarleton been the Piston, since few men of their time were better able to defend themselves. Is it not on record that he graduated as Master of Fence on October 23, 1587?

Stage history does not tell us when Kyd's famous play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, was first produced or by whom, but, for aught that can be advanced to the contrary, it might have been a Queen's Men's play. In the character of Ped-

ringano there is a decided smack of Tarleton. One recalls how, in the execution scene, this merry wight is full of droll conceits, his high spirits being due to his hugging of the fatuous belief that a reprieve is imminent. He warns the hangman that he might still live to break his knave's pate for him, provoking a reply which presents the only allusion in the play to his stature:

Alas!

Sir, you are a foot too low to reach it:  
And I hope you will never grow so high,  
While I am in the office.

To say that Tarleton's influence on English drama was far-reaching is not to say that it was wholly beneficial. But, whether for good or evil, once it has been recognised, it demonstrates his pre-eminence and his potency. To arrive at the formative forces his genius liberated one has to consider him in two aspects—as clown and as the creator of a new dramatic genre. Emphatically, he was not a great actor. He was too highly individualised both physically and temperamentally to possess either plasticity or personative powers. He stands aloof from the Burbages and the Alleyns of his age, though scarcely on a lower plane. Artistry he had, but it was not of

the purely interpretative order. It was essentially spontaneous, creative, an art of direct appeal. Before the music-hall was dreamt of, he was, in truth, the first great music-hall comedian—an indisputable fact which serves to draw attention to another fact, long obscured, that, in supplementing its legitimate fare with extrinsic song and dance and feats of acrobatics, the Elizabethan Theatre sowed the seeds which germinated into that once vital institution which, until the period of its decline and fall, best gave expression to English genius. We know that allied to his abounding mother-wit he had extemporising gifts beyond the common, and as a substantive entertainer could thyme at will on topics suggested by his audience. Even when acting, the temptation to embroider upon his lines, to introduce irrelevant comic business and play for the laugh, was too great to be resisted. The law of liberty abrogated the law of writ, so strongly was he entrenched in the affections of his public. Years after his death Peacham could recall how

Tarlot, when his head was only seene,  
The tire-house doore and tapestrie betweene,  
Set all the multitude in such a laughter,  
They could not hold for scarce an houre after.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Thalia's Banquet*, 1620, Epigram 94.

Writing in 1597, Joseph Hall draws a painful picture showing how inimical to the dramatic proprieties was the convention which Tarleton's clowning established. *Tamburlaine*, or some such play, is being acted, and in the midst of the pulsations of a grimly tragic story the whole tone is suddenly and scandalously lowered:

Now, lest such frightfull showes of Fortunes  
fall,  
And bloody Tyrants rage, should chance appall  
The dead-struck audience, midst the silent rout,  
Comes leaping in a selfe-misformed lout,  
And laughs and grins, and frames his Mimick  
face,  
And jostles straight into the princes place:  
Then doth the theatre eccho all aloud,  
With gladsome noyse of that applauding crowd.  
A goodly hotch-potch: when vile Russetings  
Are match't with monarchs, and with mighty  
kings.  
A goodly grace to sober Tragick Muse,  
When each base clown, his clumbsie fist doth  
bruise,  
And show his teeth in double rotten row  
For laughter at his selfe-resembled show.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars often overlook the fact that the very play in whose prologue Marlowe poured out the

<sup>1</sup> *Virgidemiarum*, 1597, Satires, I, iii.

vials of his wrath on “such conceits as clownage keeps in pay” was abominably disfigured by episodical buffoonery of the kind at which Hall girds. When Richard Jones, the printer, came to give the two parts of *Tamburlaine* to the world, he took care to remind the reader in a prefatory epistle that he had purposely omitted “certain fond and frivolous gestures, digressing, and, in my poor opinion, far unmeet for the matter, which I thought might seem more tedious unto the wise than anyway else to be regarded, though haply they have been of some vain, conceited fondlings greatly gaped at, what time they were showed upon the stage in their graced deformities”. Stickler as he was, like all self-respecting dramatists, for the law of writ, Marlowe stood impotent in the midst of the clamours of the great god, Demos, for the law of liberty. Even Shakespeare’s exhortation to the clowns, considerably as it may have been hearkened unto by his fellows of the Globe, has never been seriously taken to heart by the great mass of players or their public. Tarleton was the elemental low comedian, and he established for his clan a convention of gagging which has held good until our own day. Few veteran playgoers of catholic tastes but have a sneaking regard for the whole-

souled, artistic-minded gagger, the Tooles and Arthur Robertses who can augment and embellish a rôle without in anywise injuring the author's concept. It was not without forethought that the Italy of old styled its great school of extemporisers the *commedia dell' arte*.

Though wisely eschewing revolutionary innovation, Shakespeare was a magnificent betterer of other people's ideas. It would seem that at some period early in his career he had said to himself, "The Clown is irresistible—why not organise the Clown?" No previous dramatist had solved the problem of assimilating the comic forces liberated by Tarleton, of rendering helpful what had been purely distracting and destructive. Shakespeare, with his all-embracing mind, his genius for harmonising discords, hit upon the means, and the result was Launce and Speed, Bottom and Dogberry. If to Tarleton's pro-creative powers we owe these rich possessions, then *pro tanto quid retribuamus?*

Not that "Pleasant Willie's" claims upon posterity have been wholly ignored. He was the first to be given that spontaneous tribute which the England of old almost wholly reserved for her great funmakers: the distinction of tavern apotheosis. Two hundred years after his death

there still survived in the Borough an alehouse sign of the "Tabour and Pipe Man", portraying him much as he is represented in Scottowe's drawing. Early in the eighteenth century, Jemmy Spiller, Hogarth's boon companion, who to Tarleton's mother-wit united gifts of subtle characterisation far beyond his powers, was similarly honoured. In the right line of descent, too, was Joe Grimaldi, who, despite his hybridic origin, was practically the reincarnation of the Saxon spirit of boisterous fun. It is curious that in giving the clown new life, in urbanising him, Grimaldi should have instinctively reverted in large measure to the clown's Elizabethan garb (doubtless for sausage-hiding purposes) and restored Tarleton's trunk hose to its pride of place. In this connection one recalls how Wright indulged in a humorous reminiscence in his *Passions of the Minde in generall* in 1601:

Sometimes I have seene Tarleton play the clowne, and use no other breeches than such sloppes or slivings as now many gentlemen weare: they are almost capable of a bushel of wheate; and if they be of sackcloth, they would serve to carrie mawlt to the mill.

Considerable as was the influence of Tarleton's clowning on the trend of Elizabethan drama,

particularly in the persistence of homely admixtures in tragedy—had there been no Tarleton there would not have been any gravedigger in *Hamlet*—his influence as playwright was hardly less considerable. Yet this facet of his genius has been consistently ignored. He was the pioneer of one type of play in our country, a persisting, if uncommon, type, and the actual creator of another. To him we owe the popularisation of the composite play, that curious form of entertainment which had its origin in Italy and had intermittent exemplification on our stage for a century and a half.<sup>1</sup> Notable for its having released the dramatist from the tyranny of the Horatian five-act form, the composite play consisted of a number of short plays grouped together within a self-justifying framework. The best exemplar of the type that has come down to us is Davenant's *A Playhouse to be Let*. From a wordy war which took place between Gabriel Harvey and Tom Nashe in 1592,<sup>2</sup> we know that Tarleton wrote a play called *The Seven Deadly Sins*, now lost; but we should know nothing more about it

<sup>1</sup> For fuller details, see the chapter on "Early Composite Plays" in my *Pre-Restoration Stage Studies*.

<sup>2</sup> W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouse*, p. 107.

were it not for the existence of other evidence showing that it was a composite play in two parts, each playlet dealing with a particular sin. This evidence is no less a document than an old Elizabethan (though perhaps not the original) "plot" of the second part of the play.<sup>1</sup> The plot, or "platt", as it was more commonly called, was a parchment hung up in the tiring-house during a performance for the guidance of the players and stage-keepers, and presenting a neatly written account of the action-sequence of the play. Owing to the fact that Payne Collier, in discussing this particular plot and several others that have come down to us in his *History of English Dramatic Poetry* a little over a century ago, miscomprehended their nature and thought they were scenarios for experimental productions after the manner of the improvised comedies of Italy<sup>2</sup>—an erroneous idea which prevailed until quite recently—Tarleton, as pioneer, has never received the credit that is his due.

But, long as the fact has been obscured, Pleasant Willie's chief claim for remembrance as

<sup>1</sup> *Vide Greg, Dramatic Documents*, p. 104, for a reproduction in reduced facsimile.

<sup>2</sup> *Edit. 1831, III*, p. 398.

a playwright lies in his creation of that dear delight of the Elizabethan multitude known somewhat confusingly to the modern mind as the Jig. Inspired by the old may-games and given as an afterpiece in the common theatres only, the jig was a merry kind of lyrical farce for three or four characters of whom the clown generally made one. Written in rhyme, it was entirely sung and danced to a series of popular tunes. As often as not its theme was of a scandalous, sometimes libellous, order. Nothing of its exact nature has for long been seen on the stage, yet it had a very considerable innings. Of the remarkable aftermath which resulted from Dick Tarleton's tilling of his own little holding it would be difficult to speak in terms of exaggeration. Carried over to Germany late in the sixteenth century and after by troupe upon troupe of English comedians, the jig acquired there so steadily accretive a popularity that its vogue terminated in the emulative creation of the native Singspiel. At home it held its own until the silencing of the theatres, and was even played surreptitiously in the dark days of the Commonwealth. Scorned in the courtier-haunted theatres of the Restoration, it took refuge among the strollers, and finally made its last stand in the theatrical booths of Bartholomew Fair. There

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in its advanced age, it proved curiously pro-creative, for it gave John Gay the hint from which he developed that less artistic (because heterogeneous) type of musical entertainment, the Ballad Opera.

## Chapter III

### SOME REFLECTIONS ON SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATURGY

Of the making of books about William Shakespeare and his works there is virtually no end. The cry is, still they come. Within living memory enough of them has been written to stock a good-sized library. Already the weary reviewer has grown restive beneath the steady downpour, and moans of protest rend the air. There is a certain irony in the situation, for, notwithstanding the microscopic examination to which Shakespeare's plays and poems have been subjected, not all that could be sensibly and usefully written about them has been written. Only a few morsels of bread have accompanied the abundant flow of sack. I am here giving voice to certain reflections thrust upon me not so very long ago by a curious personal experience. A casual remark made by that distinguished actor, Mr John Gielgud, in the course of an interview published in *The Observer* in May 1936, sowed seeds in my mind, which, through chancing to find congenial soil,

grew and grew until they finally blossomed out into an interesting discovery: nothing less than an unexplored facet of Shakespeare's fluctuant dramaturgy.<sup>1</sup> The marvel is that what I found should, in its totality, have been so long hidden. For generations past all the vital evidence upon the point have been staring scholars in the face.<sup>2</sup> By no means a hard-and-fast principle of Shakespeare's constructiveness, admitting only of occasional application, this trait seems to have been the outcome of an obsession which came upon him early in his middle period and created a persistent urge to resort to an individual (and,

<sup>1</sup> Referring to the very successful revival of *Romeo and Juliet* at the New Theatre in which he had made so notable a Romeo, Mr Gielgud said that he had found his absence from the stage during the entire fourth act in every way a considerable advantage.

<sup>2</sup> Shortly after this study first appeared in the *London Mercury* of July 1936, that accomplished Shakespearean scholar, Mr Gordon Crosse, was considerate enough to write to me pointing out—what I had strangely overlooked—that A. C. Bradley, in his classic on *Shakespearean Tragedy* (2nd edition, 1905, p. 56), had foreshadowed my discovery in showing how the great poet had followed the constructive peculiarity I had outlined in several of his tragedies. Had Bradley only seen that the application of this principle was not confined to work inspired by the severer muse, it would not be a matter of foreshadowing, but of forestallment. In the circumstances, the chief value of my study lies in the evidence advanced showing its wider use. It was not distinctively a tragic principle.

as I believe, unique) method of scaffolding in the building of his plays, a hankering so insistent that it has to be gratified at every available opportunity. Its manifestations reveal that, unlike the vast majority of dramatists, Shakespeare was no believer in the efficacy of keeping his protagonist perpetually in the public eye.

What we have to bear in mind on setting out on this inquiry is that, throughout the Elizabethan age, the old Horatian principle of the five-act mould was the rigid rule. There has been some dispute of its authority in Shakespeare's case, and at present the "noes" have it, but my investigation will have been made to little purpose if it fails incidentally to show that in this respect he bowed to prescript. The evidence, as I find it, clearly demonstrates that once he reached his fourth act when in the throes of composition in his middle and final periods, he was always disposed to remove one or more of his principal characters (mostly, his protagonist) from sight, and keep them off the stage for a very considerable period. Sometimes this prolonged disappearance was thoroughly rationalised by the dramatic exigencies, as in Hero's case in *Much Ado about Nothing*, a circumstance which has served to delay the recognition of Shakespeare's idiosyn-

crasy; but now and again it is to be found manifesting itself without any apparent reason. It is the unmotivated instances which reveal the obsession. There was undoubtedly a purpose behind its workings, but a consideration of the nature of that purpose may be postponed until the existence of the principle has been fully demonstrated.

It would be a waste of the reader's time and a trial of his patience to enter upon any discussion here of those withdrawals of outstanding Shakespearean characters at the fourth act which were occasioned by the dramatic exigencies, were it not that the enumeration of such instances serves to reveal how often the Master was attracted to plots which admitted of easy exercise of the principle. Apart from this, the earliest play of the type raises a notable side-issue. From that formidable phalanx which now maintains that Shakespeare neither wrote his plays in acts nor had them acted in acts, I shall doubtless be assailed with a storm of protest and accused of a flagrant begging of the question when I lay stress on the circumstance that Romeo is off the stage during the whole of the fourth act. It will be flung at me that the divisions in the tragedy are modern and of no validity. But there is one

way in which that argument can be effectually countered. *Twelfth Night* was written only a year or two after *Romeo and Juliet*, and the Folio text of *Twelfth Night*—the only one we possess—is fully divided. The triumph of my position is that, in that most delightful of comedies, Viola is absent from the stage during the entire fourth act, and that without any apparent reason. This remarkable synchronisation affords us reason for believing that the modern divisions of the tragedy are substantially accurate, and fortifies the valiant few who unite with me in maintaining that the plays of Shakespeare, like all the plays of all the other dramatists of his time, were written to be played in acts. Intervals of some sort there certainly were, but the likelihood is that they were of the utmost brevity.<sup>1</sup>

As for the length of time a principal character might be kept off the stage, it necessarily varied. Much depended on the circumstances. Shakespeare was no rigid formalist, and he no more wrote, than Mercutio fought, by the book of arithmetic. The period might be as short as one of 280 lines, and it might even extend (although exceptionally and in his final years only) to 1690, but in the majority of cases it ran from 400 to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. William Archer, *Playmaking*, pp. 131 and 135.

560. The following table shows that all the lengthened withdrawals of leading characters in the tragedies were confined within these narrow limits:

<i>Title.</i>	<i>Character.</i>	<i>Duration of Withdrawal.</i>
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> .	Romeo .	Throughout the fourth act (402 lines).
<i>Hamlet</i> .	Hamlet .	From Act iv, sc. 5, to Act v, sc. 1 (500).
<i>Macbeth</i> .	Macbeth .	From Act iv, sc. 2, to Act v, sc. 2 (443).
<i>King Lear</i> .	Lear .	From Act iii, sc. 7, to Act iv, sc. 5 (490). <sup>1</sup>
<i>Coriolanus</i> .	Coriolanus	From Act iv, sc. 5, to Act v, sc. 2 (442).

A scrutiny of this table reveals that all the withdrawals, with one exception—that of *King Lear*—were made in the same act, the fourth, and the exception serves to draw attention to the fact that Shakespeare, at the beginning of his ripest period, changed his method, electing then to take his principals off the boards at a some-

<sup>1</sup> As the standard *King Lear* text is a composite, made up from the Quarto and the Folio, there is no certainty as to how long in the original version the king remained off the stage. At best, act iv, scenes 2, 3, 4, and 5 are mere padding, inessential to the action, and scene 3 is omitted in the Folio.

what earlier juncture, though it is to be remarked that in writing *Coriolanus* he reverted to his earlier practice.

Bertram, in *All's Well that Ends Well*, has no amiable characteristics, and one is apt to wonder why Shakespeare bestowed upon him the distinction which he usually reserved for men and women of a nobler or finer type. After having taken part for long, more or less prominently, in the action, he disappears from act iv, sc. 4, to act v, sc. 3, or during four short scenes. This is really immaterial, and is of interest only because of the curiously coincidental juncture at which the disappearance takes place. It is much as with *Hamlet* in point of the moment and the duration of the withdrawal, and the two plays were much of a period. More remarkable still, the case of *Macbeth*, though coming a lustrum later, tallies.

There are in all a dozen of these notable disappearances, and they are equally divided between Shakespeare's middle and final periods, but in only a single instance can I find grounds for surmising a purely theatrical reason for the withdrawal. In *Cymbeline*, that poor apology for a hero, Leonatus Posthumus, is kept off the stage throughout the whole of the third and fourth acts. It may be mere delusion, but I have long

been haunted by the idea—born of the stressed physical resemblance between Cloten and Posthumus, and of the circumstance that the former is wearing the latter's clothes at the time he meets with his death—that the two characters were designed to be acted by the one player. Otherwise, it is puzzling to know why Shakespeare took particular care the two should never meet. If “doubling” in theatrical parlance is the secret—and there was much doubling in Shakespeare's day—the prolonged absence of Posthumus from the traffic of the scene is readily understandable.

Of the two acknowledged plays of Shakespeare's final period in which he was no more than a collaborator, *Pericles* and *King Henry VIII*, it is curious to note that not only do these sustained withdrawals of the principal character occur in both, but that in each case they take place in the third act. In *Pericles*, the eponymous hero, though he makes a momentary appearance in the dumb show in act iv, sc. 4, takes no part in the main action from the opening of act iii, until act iv, sc. 6, or while some 554 lines are being delivered, the longest Shakespearean lapse of the sort up to the period. In *King Henry VIII* the spell of temporary banishment is slightly

exceeded, since the bluff and burly king is withdrawn from sight from the latter part of act III, sc. 2, to act V, sc. 1, inclusive, a stretch of some 596 lines. The inference would be that Shakespeare not only took part in the writing of both plays but had a material hand in their construction.

But one must not overlook the fact that midway between the two came *The Winter's Tale*, a play of arresting uniqueness, remarkable not only because of the duplication of the withdrawal but because, in each case, of its extensiveness. Leontes and Hermione are both kept out of sight for an unexampled period, and both are wholly absent throughout the fourth act. Leontes remains away while 1187 lines are being spoken, or from the end of act III, sc. 2, until the beginning of act V. Hermione disappears for a still longer period, or during the delivery of some 1690 lines. In her case, the long withdrawal serves an excellent purpose, as it enables Shakespeare to effect what he so seldom attempts—a dramatic surprise.

A discovery such as mine is apt to be dismissed contemptuously as merely curious and interesting unless it prove a pass-key to unyielding doors. I accept the challenge. It has already been pointed out that, after having begun early in his final

period to make his withdrawals of characters at an earlier juncture than formerly, Shakespeare reverted in *Coriolanus* to his pristine method. In connection with what is now to follow, this fact requires to be borne steadily in mind. Scholarly opinion has for long been of two minds as to whether *The Two Noble Kinsmen* has an equal right with *Pericles* and *King Henry VIII*, on much the same counts, to be included in the Shakespeare canon. I am happy to say that those who cry content can now be given some material support. Although remaining unprinted until 1634, when it was described on the title-page as "written by the memorable Worthies of their time; Mr John Fletcher, and Mr William Shakespeare, Gent", *The Two Noble Kinsmen* had been produced by the King's Players in 1613.<sup>1</sup> Written three years after *The Winter's Tale*, it resembles that play in presenting a double withdrawal of the principals. There is of a surety prime significance in the fact that Palamon and Arcite are both withheld from view throughout the fourth act. If one cannot conclude from this that Shakespeare had a material hand in the play, and most likely drafted the scenario, then the long arm

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. H. C. Oliphant, *The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher*, pp. 325 ff.

THE  
TWO  
NOBLE  
KINSMEN:

Presented at the Blackfriers  
by the Kings Maiesties servants,  
with great applause:

---

Written by the memorable Worthies

of their time;

{ M<sup>r</sup>. John Fletcher, and } Gent.  
{ M<sup>r</sup>. William Shakspere. }

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Printed at London by Tho. Cotes, for John Waterston:  
and are to be sold at the signe of the Crowne  
in Pauls Church-yard. 1634.

Title-page of the First Quarto of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, 1634



of coincidence must be a mighty long arm indeed.

The main question, however, is, what purpose was served by the principle? On this score it would be rash to pontify, but it seems to me that the answer is suggested by the conclusions so ably arrived at in Richard G. Moulton's *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, a work now half a century old that it is not so well known or appreciated as its qualities justify. Moulton was a scholar of so great analytic powers and of so keen an acuity that the marvel is to me that he failed to light upon this principle of Shakespearean withdrawals when engaged upon his fruitful investigation; surely a misfortune, for the facts as I have marshalled them would have yielded excellent buttressing of his main thesis. Making great play with the Dramatic Centre in Shakespeare, he defines it as the point in which the Complicating and Resolving forces meet, and goes on to say that, in accord with the poet's favourite custom, it is placed in the exact mechanical centre of the drama, covering the middle of the middle act. Later on, after having fully exemplified this, he writes:

Now we have already had occasion to notice the prominence which Shakespeare in his dramatic con-

struction gives to the central point of the play; symmetry more than sensation is the effect which has an attraction for his genius, and the finale to which the action is led is not more important to him than the balancing of the whole drama about a turning-point in the middle. Accordingly it is not surprising to find that in the Passion-Movement of his dramas a similar plan of construction is often followed; that all other variations are subordinated to one great Climax of Passion at the centre. To repeat an illustration already applied to Plot, the movement of the passion seems to follow the form of a regular arch, commencing in calmness, rising through emotional strain to a summit of agitation in the centre, then through the rest of the play, declining into a calmness of a different kind.

Lewis Campbell, after pointing out that Moulton's idea of the arch was derived from Gervinus, disputes the accuracy of the analogy. Rather would he compare "the rise and fall of tragic intensity to a parabola—the natural path of a projectile in rapid motion—of which the *acme* lies somewhere beyond the central point".<sup>1</sup> With this distinction most investigators will be inclined to agree, but the point is not of any particular moment in connection with our present inquiry. There can be little doubt now, I think, that Shakespeare's lengthened withdrawal of his

<sup>1</sup> *Tragic Drama in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Shakespeare*, p. 78.

principals deliberately aimed at a slackening of the tension. Thoroughly romantic as he was in fibre, he was severely classic in this slowing down. So far from ending abruptly on the topmost note of emotional stress, his tragedies draw to a close in a diminuendo of philosophic calm. In this, if in nothing else, he was Greek of the Greeks.

## Chapter IV

### CONCERNING “TO BE OR NOT TO BE”

Though the intriguing character of Hamlet has been minutely X-rayed by a good many astute intellects with the hope of determining why the young prince procrastinated so disastrously in swooping to his revenge, it is noteworthy, if by no means astonishing, that nobody has entertained any suspicion of his possession of an initial, though impermanent trait, one which only awaits full recognition to afford a rational and conclusive solution to the perplexing mystery. The reference here is to a line of thought which for a time Hamlet obstinately harboured, but which certain curious circumstances have long obscured; and it is part of my present purpose to remove the difficulties barring the way to a proper understanding of the matter. My main aim is to show that at the outset of the play in one of its earlier forms, Hamlet had no belief in the existence of ghosts, and that his delay in

fulfilling the grave task imposed upon him was wholly due to the stubborn persistence of that concept. Scepticism of this order, we know, was far from being a common Elizabethan attitude, so far indeed that it flew in the face of popular opinion; but we require to bear in mind that even Horatio shared it, though, of the two, he was the quicker to be convinced of his mistake.

*Hamlet* was the one play of Shakespeare's with whose approach to perfection he was seemingly never satisfied. This is evidenced by the fact that for a considerable number of years—possibly a whole decade—its acting text was kept in a state of flux. One must remember that in this case, as in a few others, Shakespeare was dealing with a theme which had already had more or less competent stage treatment, and that he could only justify its rehandling by the superiority of his work. The story of the Elizabethan dramatisations of the old Danish saga is practically a reversal of the transformation undergone by Sir John Cutler's famous stockings, for what in the beginning was good honest worsted ended by becoming imperishable silk. The facts, unfortunately, are so vague that one has to rely largely on inference, but it would appear that Shakespeare, while preserving the broad outlines of the primi-

tive *Hamlet* play, contrived, by frequent revision, to sublimate its thought and exalt its whole tone. Although it was not until the beginning of the seventeenth century that his name became identified with the theme, the probabilities are that his first retouching of the old play of doubtful authorship—call it Kyd's, if you please—took place in 1594, when it came into the possession of the Chamberlain's Men whose ranks he had just joined, and who revived it at Newington Butts in the June of that year. Later on, at any rate, he worked at intervals on the text, even changing the names of one or two of the characters, and eventually transmogrified the vigorous old melodrama of revenge into a reflective tragedy suffused with philosophical speculation. Whatever he may have owed to his predecessor, whether Kyd or another, of a surety the introspective *Hamlet* was solely his. There had been some foreshadowing of the type in the character of the King in *Richard the Second* late in 1596, and it is not improbable that the concept of the melancholy brooding Dane—no matter when it may have been put into execution—dates from that period.

Much of this is pure conjecture, but my argument in its totality is not devoid of stable founda-

tion. It would be easy to show, if one dare risk confusing the issue by going off at a tangent, that the second quarto of *Hamlet*, otherwise the first authentic text, is a revisal of an earlier Shakespearean text. Few scholars have grasped this fact, but the truth on the point is slowly emerging. However they may have been occasioned, not all the alterations were for the best, and one at least—the only one germane to my subject—is a serious (and what is worse, ineradicable) blot upon the play.

There are cogent reasons for believing that that most famous of all soliloquies, “To be or not to be”, does not at present occupy the position for which it was originally designed. Bradley had some suspicion to this effect purely because he found the speech occurring in a somewhat earlier scene in the spurious quarto.<sup>1</sup> But he failed to see in this quarto what it really is, an ill-made version of the play, botched up for a troupe of strollers, equally remarkable for its transpositions

<sup>1</sup> A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, second edition, 1903, p. 132, note. Even one or two latter-day exponents of *Hamlet* have seen that there is something wrong. According to William Winter's *Shakespeare on the Stage*, both Wilson Barrett and E. S. Willard, in their revivals of the play, transferred the soliloquy from the third act to the second.

and its absurdities, and so far devoid of authenticity that no analogies can be safely drawn from it. Apart from this, it is noteworthy that other matters moved him to surprise. Is Hamlet, he asks, thinking of "The Murder of Gonzago", which is to be acted in a few hours, and on which everything depends? And he answers:

Not at all, he is meditating on suicide; and he finds that what stands in the way of it, and counterbalances its infinite attraction, is not any thought of a sacred unaccomplished duty, but the doubt, quite irrelevant to the issue, whether it is not ignoble in the mind to end its misery, and still more whether death *would* end it. Hamlet, that is to say, is here, in effect, precisely where he was at the time of his first soliloquy ("O that this too too solid flesh would melt") two months ago, before ever he heard of his father's murder. His reflections have no reference to this particular moment; they represent that habitual weariness of life with which his passing outbursts of emotion or energy are contrasted.

The only difference is that in the "to be or not to be" soliloquy, there is no reference to the idea that suicide is forbidden by "the Everlasting." Even this, however, seems to have been present in the original form of the speech, for the version in the First Quarto has a line about our being "borne before an everlasting Judge".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Goldsmith's searching analysis of "To be or 'not to be'" in his *Essays*, No. 16, on Metaphor, published in

What I marvel over is that Bradley's recognition of the fact that Hamlet had got "no forrader", that he is exactly in the third act in the state of mind he was in the first, notwithstanding all that has happened in the interim, failed to confirm him in his suspicion (though it may have been an afterthought, being expressed in a footnote) that the great soliloquy had somehow slipped its moorings. Moreover, it bears of itself clear evidence that it comes belatedly. To make Hamlet speak of "the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns" after he had communed with his father's spirit is sheer absurdity. There have been not a few attempts to explain away this anomaly, some super-subtle some silly, but one and all are futile.<sup>1</sup> There is

1785. His opinion was that the soliloquy, which he had often heard extolled in terms of admiration, was "a heap of absurdities, whether we consider the situation, the sentiment, the argument, or the poetry".

<sup>1</sup> Schlegel maintained, for example, that Shakespeare here wished to show that Hamlet could not fix himself to any conviction of any kind whatever, but he surely did not doubt the evidence of his own senses. Mr J. Middleton Murry (*Shakespeare*, p. 244), on the other hand, is of the belief that "Hamlet has, whether properly or not, also forgotten the Ghost. There is nothing to worry about; it merely means that Hamlet, for the moment, has escaped his local particularity and become pure human. Let us say pure Shakespeare". But was pure Shakespeare ever pure nonsense?

absolutely no need to summon metaphysical aid to read the riddle. Since the reference predicates Hamlet's utter disbelief, not in apparitions or spirit-manifestations, but in the return to earth of the spirits of the departed, the speech containing it must have been written to be spoken before his awe-inspiring interview with his father's ghost on the battlements had taken place. Remark that when told by Horatio and the watch of the visitations of the ghost, the young prince says:

If it *assume* my noble father's person,  
I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape  
And bid me hold my peace.

Exactly what was at the back of his mind when he thus expressed himself is revealed by what he says in the soliloquy at the close of the second act:

The spirit that I have seen  
May be the devil: and the devil hath power  
To *assume* a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps  
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
As he is very potent with such spirits,  
Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds  
More relative than this.

It is not until the abrupt termination of "The Murder of Gonzago" that he is fully assured he has been in actual communion with his father's

spirit. He is prepared then to take the ghost's word for a thousand pounds.

My firm belief is that "To be or not to be" was written for delivery, and for a time was delivered, exactly where "O that this too too solid flesh would melt" is now to be found. Substitute the one for the other, and the reference to "the undiscovered country" is informed with rich dramatic irony, for hardly has it been made before Hamlet is given some assurance of the return of one he dearly loved from that uncharted land. On more than a single count, therefore, this is a highly disturbing revelation. But the question is, if the great soliloquy was thus originally situated, how came it to be displaced? It seems to me that the whole trend of Hamlet's musing in it affords the answer. Apart from the fact that the speech is informed, appositely enough, with the scholar's melancholy, one may echo Bradley and say that Hamlet's reflections have no reference to the particular moment, nor, indeed, to any moment. Dramatically speaking, that is its weakness. Superb as it rings, it is sheer divagation. For once in a while; and there are a few other instances in the canon. Shakespeare has brushed his character aside and given voice to his own thoughts. There is autobiography

here, if one could only avail of the clue. As Dr Johnson was the first to observe, Hamlet, though he complains of them, had no experience of

The insolence of office, and the spurns  
That patient merit of the unworthy takes. . . .

These are thoughts uttered in a vacuum. They are purely objective, dealing with the abstract. It is humanity at large that is voicing its grievances, not Hamlet. His fardels were otherwise. Dramatically speaking, it is a bad soliloquy that can be torn bodily from its context without injury to its cogency, as this one admits of (one recalls that Pepys actually set it to music): yet what constitutes its defects from a dramaturgic standpoint has won for it immortality. Truly, it is a mad world, my masters!

Assuming the correctness of my surmise concerning the original location of "To be or not to be", I take it that it must have been written on or about 1597, hardly earlier, and certainly not much later. It would seem that after it had held its pristine position for a time either Shakespeare himself arrived individually at the conclusion that the trend of thought in the soliloquy was too abstract for the situation or some such opinion was conveyed to him by a person of

approved judgment, with the result that he set about writing a substitute. Hence the origin of "O that this too too solid flesh would melt", which, in contrast with the other, has the merit of a particular relevancy. This conception is, I think, sensible enough, but my powers of imagination are not rich enough to suggest any very plausible reason for the subsequent insertion of the discarded soliloquy in another part of the play. One can only surmise that Burbage, haunted by the beauty of the lines and longing for the re-experience of the applause he had received in delivering them, had pleaded for their preservation somewhere, and that Shakespeare yielded to the entreaty, and, in spite of his better judgment, placed the soliloquy where we now find it. The misfortune is that by this unhappy transference a fortuitous slur has been cast upon Hamlet's character. Coming exactly where it does, the soliloquy conveys to us what Shakespeare never intended. As Professor Tucker Brooke has well put it:

The complete selfishness of the argument, the refusal to recognise any duty to live for the sake of his mission, and the astonishing "bestial oblivion" evidenced by the allusion to the undiscovered country on the tongue of one who has recently spoken with

his own father's ghost—these all shock the attentive reader and show the speaker's intelligence at its nadir.<sup>1</sup>

Mortal hand cannot now repair this fault. To discard the great soliloquy is out of the question, and to amend matters by placing it in its pristine position is equally impossible. But something will be gained if scholarship ceases to be sand-blind upon the point and comes to recognise the truth. Luckily, such is Shakespeare's wizardry, that not all the many flaws in *Hamlet* can diminish for student or playgoer the glamour of its perennial appeal.

<sup>1</sup> "Hamlet's Third Soliloquy", in *Studies in Philology*, xiv, 1917, pp. 117 ff.

## Chapter V

### THE DEDICATION OF EARLY ENGLISH PLAYS

It is truly painful to find that, notwithstanding the widespread industry of the many Elizabethan researchers of our time, there yet remain plain facts staring scholarship full in the face which scholarship persists in looking at with unseeing eyes. For example, by way of proving that Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, took but a tepid interest in contemporary drama, we are told by Mr Arthur Gray in his interesting book of conjecture, *A Chapter in the Early Life of Shakespeare*,<sup>1</sup> that, although he was before the close of the sixteenth century the centre of a literary circle, none of the dramatists ever dedicated to him a play. Here the implication is as inept as implication could well be. There was quite another reason for the abstention: it was thoroughly symptomatic of the temper of the times. Throughout Elizabeth's reign it was in

<sup>1</sup> P. 106.

nowise fashionable to dedicate new plays acted by the common players to any person of social distinction, and acts of the sort were of the utmost rarity. It is true that as early as 1562 James Rowbotham had inscribed his *Pleasant and wittie Playe of the Cheasts* to that Maecenas of letters, the Earl of Leicester, a piece of whose antecedents we know nothing; but, so far from that being taken as a precedent, no ordinary play was ever dedicated to a person of consequence for another forty years. The explanation is simple. As literature, the drama of the people lost caste with the erection of the first theatre in Shoreditch in 1576 and the necessary professionalisation of dramatic authorship. In those days all writing done for pay was looked upon as soiled in the process, and unworthy of patronage. It was not a mere matter of narrow insular prejudice: the whole civilised world still had the feeling that the arts should not be bought and sold in the market-place: it was a prolongation of the renaissance spirit. Even when the seventeenth century had got well under weigh, Gaillard could write with a curl of the lip, that

Corneille est excellent, mais il vend ses ouvrages,  
Rotrou fait bien les vers, mais il est poète à  
gages.

With this feeling in the air, it is not surprising that the Elizabethan dramatist's muse, in having lent her aid to the writing of verses for a market wherein they were clapper-clawed by the vulgar, came to be considered no better than a common drab.

If we have lost sight of that attitude, it is because it has become obscured by the contemporary existence of certain nice distinctions. Against drama in its quiddity, apart from puritanical prepossessions, there was no initial prejudice.<sup>1</sup> University plays, whether in Latin or English, plays written for Court or inns-of-court performance, and plays that were purely literary products and not intended for the stage, suffered no such ban. They were placed in a higher category. Most of the early translations of Seneca had epistles dedicatory to more or less distinguished people. In 1591, *Tancred and Gismunda*, an Inner Temple tragedy, was inscribed by Robert Wilmot to Lady Mary Peter and Lady Anne Gray. A year

<sup>1</sup> *Acolastus*, the first dedicated play in English, was issued in black letter in quarto in 1540, and bore an inscription to Henry VIII. It was a translation from the Latin of Guil. Fullonius of Hagen, by John Palsgrave, and dealt with the story of the Prodigal Son. Originally intended as a school book, it was doubtless put to the same purpose in its new guise.

later, William Gager's *Meleager*, an Oxford Latin play acted at the University before a notable audience comprising Sidney and Leicester among its numbers, was dedicated to Essex. In 1594, Kyd, though a well-known professional dramatist, was permitted openly to place his unacted translation of the *Cornelie* of Garnier at the feet of the Countess of Sussex. No play unsmeared of the common stage but had its patron. Few, however, of the earlier epistles dedicatory have any interest. The most noteworthy exception occurred in 1578, when George Whetstone, in inscribing his *Promos and Cassandra* to his kinsman, William Fleetwood, took advantage of the opportunity to indulge in a critical disquisition on drama.

In the circumstances, speculation naturally arises as to why the anonymous author of *Fedele and Fortunio, the pleasaunt and fine conceited Comoedie of two Italian Gentlemen* (generally taken to have been Anthony Munday)<sup>1</sup> chose, in 1585, to ignore the taboo. Acted at Court by some unidentified company, the play was a deftly written free version of Luigi Pasqualigo's *Il Fedele*, and, for aught we know to the contrary, may have been written for

<sup>1</sup> See my article on "The Authorship of 'Fedele and Fortunio' ", in *The Times Literary Supplement* of May 20, 1920.

court performance alone. On the whole, however, there is little need to exercise one's mind over its escape from the general ban, seeing that one of the dedicatees was a person of no standing and the other could not be lured into allowing the full use of his name even by the fact that the piece had "Beene presented before the Queenes most excellent Maiestie". The real interest of the case lies in the double dedication. Two copies of the play are extant, each bearing the same epistle, but addressed to different individuals. The dedicatory masquerades under reversed initials, now as "A. M." and now as "M. A.", and the second dedicatee is no more clearly indicated. Curiously enough, the epistle is written in a strain which makes it difficult to determine whether it was the work of the adapter or some other person. It actually begins by "commending" "this pleasaunt and fine conceited Comoedie" to "Maister John Heardson, Esquire" (and "M. R.").

Since the man of varying initials had written himself down a trickster in extracting a double douceur for the dedication of the play, he was certainly wise in electing to take his place in the ranks of the obscure. True, new editions of old books were frequently given new dedicatees, but this was not a case of a new edition. Between it

and the much later instance cited by Professor D. Nichol Smith in his chapter on "Authors and Patrons" in *Shakespeare's England* there is no analogy. It appears that when, in 1658, Massinger's *The City Madam* was belatedly published by Andrew Pennycuicke, one of the players in the original cast, it was dedicated to "the truly Noble John Wrath, Esquire", and that when the play was reissued a year later the same epistle was addressed with uncomplimentary economy to "the truly Noble and virtuous Lady Anne, Countess of Oxford". In this case it was surely something more material than a soft answer which caused the turning away of Wrath.<sup>1</sup>

One recalls that in Elizabethan days there was a type of needy and unscrupulous hack (not much represented among the playwrights) who had a

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare's England*, II, 206. But the details given here are incomplete. Within the same period, other copies were dedicated to Thomas Freake and "Mr Lee, Esquire". It is also noteworthy that Pennycuicke, in issuing Dekker's *The Sun's Darling* in 1656, inscribed one copy to the Earl of Southampton and another to the Earl of Kingston. See the Malone collection in the Bodleian, Nos. 172 and 238. But the record for multiplex dedication is held by Will. Pinkethman, the comedian, who, in publishing the anonymous comedy, *Love without Interest, or The Man too Hard for his Master*, in 1699, dedicated it in quaint round-robin form to thirty-six people—six lords, six knights, and twenty-four esquires.

trick of distributing transcripts of a poem broadcast with the hope of reaping abundant recompense. For him Dekker, though the most poverty-stricken of authors, had profound contempt. In the opening scene of the Second Part of *The Honest Whore* he shows Antonio Georgio, a poor scholar, waiting upon Hippolito with a tribute, and the following colloquy ensues:

*Hip.* A book!

*Ant.* Yes, my good lord.

*Hip.* Sir, you honour me.

Kings may be scholars' patrons, but faith, tell  
me

To how many hands beside hath the bird  
flown.

How many partners share with me?

*Ant.* In troth, not one. Your name I hold most dear;  
I'm not, my lord, of that low character.

To grasp the attitude of the cultured in the late sixteenth century is to comprehend why Shakespeare expressed himself in the Sonnets as shamed by what he had brought forth. Yet wonder still continues to be confessed by the sciolist that he never took the trouble to dedicate a play to anybody! Even had he been so inclined, the dead weight of custom and opinion would have checked the impulse during the major portion of his career. Not until he was on the verge

of retirement to his native place was the old prejudice against the dedication of common plays entirely dissipated. His was the general story. It would be idle to take Samuel Daniel as the exception, because Daniel, who once exclaimed, "God forbid I should my papers blot with mercenary lines", was primarily a court poet, and only momentarily—and that by sheer stress of circumstance—a theatre poet. His unacted *Cleopatra* had been inscribed in a poetic epistle to Lady Pembroke on the plea that it had been inspired by her "well-grac'd *Antony* itself"—a translation from the French. His two privately performed pastorals he dedicated to Queen Anne, before whom they had been presented. What is curious about his career is that the man who had so great a distaste for mercenary work should have been punished for the temporary abandonment of his principles. Once, in a period of pecuniary stress, he had turned to his unfinished and neglected tragedy, *Philotas*, and completed it (though never intended for public performance) for production at the Blackfriars by the Children of the Chapel. Double mortification ensued. Not only did the play fail, but he got into trouble with the Privy Council because of the fortuitous resemblance of its plot to the story of Essex.

Yet, such was his favour at Court that when he sent it to the press in 1605, he was authorised to dedicate it in a verse epistle to Henry, Prince of Wales, his patron. It is significant, however, that the play was not printed alone like other plays, but with a selection of the author's poems.

To see the reason, therefore, for Shakespeare's abstention from play-dedication, it is not to Daniel we must turn, but to orthodox theatre-poets. Heywood, the most prolific dramatist of his time, inscribed only two of his plays to patrons, and those apologetically, and in Caroline days.<sup>1</sup> Middleton, though, sometime after 1620, he took the trouble to dedicate a specially-made scrivener's transcript of his unpublished tragicomedy, *The Witch*, to a friend, otherwise elected to remain silent. Dekker, though now and again he inscribed a city pageant to the Lord Mayor of the period, and sometimes put a patron's name in the forefront of a tract, never saw fit to dedicate a play to any particular person until near the end of his life, and then only his *Match me in London*. But in earlier days his *Shoemaker's Holiday* had been whimsically addressed "to all good

<sup>1</sup> Yet, curiously enough, he dedicated his *Apology for Actors* in 1612 to the Earl of Worcester "as an acknowledgment of the duty I am bound to you in as a servant".

fellows, professors of the Gentle Craft, of what degree whatsoever", and his retaliatory *Satiro-mastix* to "The World"—"Not to thy greatness, but to the greatness of thy scorne, defying which, let that mad dog Detraction bite till his teeth be worne to the stumps". Beaumont and Fletcher never indulged unitedly in a play-dedication, but Fletcher in the undated (1610?) quarto of *The Faithful Shepherdess* addresses separate dedicatory verses to Sir Walter Aston, Sir William Skipwith, and Sir Robert Townsend, and Beaumont inscribed his solitary court masque to Bacon and the Benchers of Gray's Inn and the Inner Temple. Masques, of course, though pertaining of the nature of drama, are not to be reckoned in the category of plays, but they were certainly soiled literature (in the old sense), in having, for the most part, been written for money; and it can only have been their common association with the Court—though the Court had no monopoly of the *genre*—that rendered them immune from contempt. Thus it was that Daniel, in 1604, dedicated his *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* to Lucy, Countess of Bedford, and Jonson, in 1609, his *Masque of Queens* to Henry, Prince of Wales. The young prince had expressed a desire for a copy of the latter masque, presenting a list of



*Portus Tonij*

• Mr. John Fletcher •



authorities on which the witches' rites represented in it were based. Jonson's manuscript dedicatory copy is now one of the treasures of the British Museum.

One is apt to be cynical about the sincerity of the average dedication of Shakespeare's day, but one at least was made in good faith since the dedicatory had little to gain by it. Marston, at the front of a particular edition of *The Malcontent*, issued in 1604 (there were several, strange to say, in that year), wrote, "Beniamino Jonsonio, poetae elegantissimo, gravissimo, amico suo, candido et cordato, Johannes Marston, Musarum alumnus, asperam hanc Thaliam D. D." Noteworthy as the first dedication from one professional dramatist to another, this honest tribute is still more remarkable from the fact that the two had been engaged not long previously in bespattering each other with mud for the amusement of the many-headed monster. Some two years earlier, Marston, doubtless finding the grapes sour, had signified his contempt for patronage by dedicating his play, *The History of Antonio and Mellida*, "to the onely rewarder, and most just poiser of vertuous merits, the most honorably renowned No-body, bountious Maecenas of Poetry, and Lord Protector of oppressed innocence". He proffered

him “the worthlesse present of my slighter idleness”—an indication of the contemporary attitude towards drama as literature—and signed himself “affied slave, and admirer”. Later, there were palpable echoes of Marston’s mockery. Day, in his epistle to “Signior No-body”, prefixed to his comedy, *Humour out of Breath*, in 1608, addresses this pretended personage as “Worthless Sir”, and, in reference to the fatigue of dancing attendance upon the high and mighty—one thinks inevitably of Chesterfield and Dr Johnson—says:

I protest I had rather bestow my pains on your good worship for a brace of angels certain, than stand to the bounty of a betterman’s purse-bearer, or a very good woman’s gentleman-usher: my reason is I cannot attend: your *Bis dat qui cito* stands so like a loadstone over your great gate, that I fear ’twill draw all the ironpated Musemongers about the town in a short time to your patronage.

This, however, was mere caprice. Day, a year previously, had united with his collaborators, Will Rowley and George Wilkins, in appropriately inscribing *The Travels of Three English Brothers* to the Sherley family. Later, in 1612, Field was to assume the old pose of indifference in his dedication of *A Woman is a Weathercock*, which he addressed to “any Woman that hath

been no Weathercock", with the confession that at first "I did determine not to have dedicated my play to anybody, because forty shillings I care not for; and above few or none will bestow on these matters especially falling from so fameless a pen as mine is yet". "Is yet" is good. Besides the revelation of the regulation douceur expected by dedicators of plays, we have here a faint clue to the reason for the continued sparsity of genuine dedications so obscurely referred to by Francis Burton, the publisher of the anonymous *Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*, who, in inscribing it early in 1607 to Sir Arthur Mannering, writes:

If custom, right worshipful, had so great a prerogative as that nothing crossing it were allowable, then ought I justly fear reprehension for this my dedication, having to my knowledge but a singular precedent herein; and the reason wherefore so many plays have formerly been published without Inscriptions unto particular Patrons, contrary to custom in divulging other books, although perhaps I could nearly guess, yet because I would willingly offend none, I will now conceal.

Whatever the "singular precedent" was that emboldened Burton to inscribe the play to Mannering—and, as shortly will be seen, there is an "if" in the matter—it proved of sufficient

potency to relieve the living drama from the slur which had for so long been cast upon it. Within a few months of the publication of *Claudius Tiberius Nero* we find Barnabe Barnes inscribing his sensational Globe play, *The Devil's Charter*, unitedly to Sir William Herbert and Sir William Pope. In the summer of 1608, Chapman, who had already had half a dozen plays published, broke silence in dedicating his *Conspiracie and Tragedie of Charles Duke of Byron, Marshal of France*, to Sir Thomas Walsingham and his son, though he took advantage of the opportunity to assure Sir Thomas that the only reason why he had not so honoured him before was that he knew he "ever stood little affected to these unprofitable rites of Dedication".

Ben Jonson's attitude towards these rites is of primary importance, because it largely accounts for the new standpoint from which the cultured now began to view the current drama, and otherwise shows that when he had reached the height of his powers, he was esteemed by them an arbiter of taste and the equal of any poet in the dramatic hierarchy. It is significant that he preserved his aloofness until early in 1607, when (according to my dating) *Volpone*, in falling from the press, was preluded by an impassioned defence

of dramatic poetry which had fallen into a cheap Aristophanic scurrility and general decay through the contempt expressed towards its makers. In addressing his dedicatory epistle with characteristic moral courage "to the two most noble and most equal sisters, the two famous Universities, for their love and acceptance shewn to this poem in the presentation", Jonson, with a sublime faith in his own powers, admitted that the times were out of joint, but that his was the mission to set them right. It would be too much to claim that this clear trumpet-call for justice, the restoration to dramatic poetry of its divine rights, blew down the walls of prejudice, but it certainly shook them to their very foundations. Once its cogency had bitten into the cultured mind, the literary enfranchisement of the self-respecting dramatist was his for the asking. To my mind, there is no valid reason for doubting that Jonson's remarkable address formed the singular "precedent" referred to by Burton the publisher, to which I have already drawn attention, but the evidence is not at all clear, and the point therefore requires some arguing. Seeing that, by some oversight, the play was not entered on the Stationers' Register, it is difficult to determine when *Volpone* was published. It is true that Jonson dates his

famous epistle "From my house in the Blackfriars this 11 of February, 1607", but this gives no help, as we are at a loss to know whether he was using the Circumcision or the Annunciation style. From time to time he used both, and was never very consistent in his use of either.<sup>1</sup> If Herford and Simpson's reading of the date as 1607-8 be correct,<sup>2</sup> Burton cannot have been referring to Jonson's epistle, as *Claudius Tiberius Nero* was entered on the Stationers' Register on April 19, 1607, and his dedication of the play to Mannering must have been written somewhere about that date. On the other hand, if we assume that Jonson was using the Circumcision style and take it that *Volpone* was published within six weeks of the dating, then there would have been ample time for Burton to become acquainted with it before writing his own dedication. Having sought in vain for anything else that might have constituted the "singular precedent", I am forced to conclude that *Volpone* fell from the press early in 1607.

Ever resolute and uncompromising in his attitude, Jonson proceeded from audacity to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, III, pp. 355, 362, and 390.

<sup>2</sup> *Ben Jonson*, II, 49.

audacity. It was an ill compliment to dedicate a recently damned play to any person, gentle or simple, even if the play had been damned unjustly, but Jonson, in inscribing *Cataline* in 1611 to William, Earl of Pembroke, got out of the difficulty by maintaining that he was appealing the case to a higher tribunal. There was subtle flattery in the insinuation that Pembroke was *arbiter elegantiarum*. "Posteritie", he was told, "may pay your benefit the honor, & thanks: when it shall know, that you dare, in these Jig-given times, to countenance a legitimate poeme". And the appeal was not in vain, for Restoration playgoers reversed the popular verdict.

Although *Cataline* was the first play publicly dedicated by Jonson to an individual, he had already, some years previously, made one or two private dedications. In 1601, he presented his patroness, Lucy, Countess of Bedford, with a finely bound copy of the quarto of *The Fountaine of Self-Love, or Cynthia's Revels*, with a dedication to her in verse on a separately printed page inserted after the title-page.<sup>1</sup> What is perhaps more

<sup>1</sup> See B. H. Newdigate's letter in *The Times Literary Supplement* of November 28, 1936, p. 996, headed "Was Lucy Bedford the Phoenix?". This copy is now in the William Andres Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

interesting to note is that Jonson, about the same time, gave another specially dedicated copy of the play to his old schoolmaster, William Camden. This copy, in which the dedicatory leaf was bound in between signatures A and A<sub>2</sub>, is in the Kemble collection, now in America, and, when formerly at Chatsworth, was seen and examined by Mr Percy Simpson. It is noteworthy that when Jonson came to reissue *Cynthia's Revels* in the Folio of 1616, the play was then dedicated to the Court, but he was considerate enough to inscribe *Every Man in his Humour* to his old mentor, although in terms which showed that the old prejudice against the drama as literature had not yet been wholly dissipated:

There are, no doubt, a supercilious race in the world, who will esteem all office done you in this kind, an injury; so solemn a vice is it with them to use the authority of their ignorance, to the crying down of Poetry, or the professors; but my gratitude must not leave to correct their error; since I am none of those that can suffer the benefits conferred upon my youth to perish with my age.

Concerning private, though printed, dedications there is a point which demands full discussion. For a quarter of a century there has been a unanimity of scholarly opinion to the effect

that the dedicatory sonnet of this order addressed to Sir Thomas Walsingham in a copy of the 1605 quarto of Chapman's *All Fools*, found by Payne Collier, is a forgery.<sup>1</sup> Yet the conclusion, which sounds to my mind like giving a dog a bad name and drowning all her pups, is seriously open to question. Apart from Collier's ill-reputation, it relies almost wholly on the fact that the sonnet is printed on an irregular-sized separate leaf, evidence which, if taken as proof positive of its spuriousness, would go far towards invalidating not only Ben Jonson's two private dedications already referred to, but a much later dedication of the sort. There happens to be extant a unique variant of Thomas Jordan's Caroline comedy, *Money is an Ass* (belatedly published in 1668), in which the title has been altered to *Wealth Outwitted, or Money's an Ass*, and a rhymed dedication to John Phillips substituted for the leaf containing the prologue and the actors' names.

It is nothing against the genuineness of the discredited sonnet that Chapman, in the dedica-

<sup>1</sup> See J. P. Collier, *Dodsley's Old Plays*; T. J. Wise's letter in *The Athenaeum* of June 27, 1908, pp. 788-9; T. M. Parrott, *Chapman's Plays*, 1907, pp. 139-42; *Shakespeare's England*, II, p. 197, D. Nichol Smith on "Authors and Patrons"; E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, III, p. 252.

tion of *Byron's Conspiracie* already referred to, expresses his knowledge of Walsingham's dislike of public praise, since the tribute was purely of a private order. Moreover, as Collier showed by his silence on the point that he was utterly unaware that he was dealing with a private dedication, and was much too erudite not to be acquainted with the dedication to *Byron's Conspiracie*, the terms of the latter would surely have stayed his hand when he was engaged in the forgery. Moreover, as he generally forged for a purpose—mostly to establish some pet theory—we have to ask ourselves, what was the impelling motive? It is remarkably curious that he made no attempt to prove anything by his find. Here are the lines he is presumed to have concocted:

*To my long-loved and honourable Friend,  
Sir Thomas Walsingham, Knight.*

Should I expose to every common eye,  
The least allow'd birth of my shaken brain;  
And not entitle it particularly  
To your acceptance, I were worse than vain.  
And though I am most loth to pass your sight  
With any such light mark of vanity;  
Being mark'd with age for aims of greater  
weight,  
And drown'd in dark death-ushering melancholy,

Yet lest by others' stealth it be imprest,  
Without my passport, patch'd with others' wit,  
Of two enforced ills I elect the least;  
And so desire your love will censure it;  
Though my old fortune keep me still obscure,  
The light shall still bewray my old love sure.

Strange that Collier did *not* point out in elucidation of his "forgery" that Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* had been published from a sophisticated and surreptitious copy! If fraud there was, the evidence fails to establish it.

National prejudices in a slow-moving country are difficult to eradicate, and it is not surprising that Ben Jonson's dignified remonstrance in *Volpone* and his subsequent boldness in daring to dedicate an ill-received play to no less a personage than the Lord Chamberlain took time to prove their efficacy. It may be, indeed, that the shackles were removed earlier than one suspects, but, in that case, one can only premise that, use being second nature, there were dramatists who still felt them galling their limbs or who were uneasy without them. Such is the perversity of human nature. Thus it was that, only a few months after the publication of *Cataline*, Chapman, in dedicating *The Widow's Tears* to

Joseph Reed of Mitton, deemed it politic to begin by saying:

Sir, if any work of this nature be worth the presenting to friends worthy and noble, I presume this will not want much of that value. Other countrymen have thought the like worthy of dukes' and princes' acceptations; *Injusti Sdegni*; *Il Pentamento Amoroſo*; *Calisthe*, *Pastor Fido*, etc. (all being plays; were all dedicated to Princes of Italy).

But seeing that the conditions were not analogous, the plea was weak and should not have been made. Chapman forgot, or, more probably, was unaware that none of these foreign works had been written for public performance, that all had been inspired by sovereigns and had been acted purely for their delectation. At home, Daniel, as court poet, had been honoured in the same way. A little later, in 1613, Chapman is a trifle surer of his ground, but still thinks it necessary to advance the old argument. In his Epistle Dedicatory to Sir Thomas Howard, prefixed to *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, one finds him saying:

Since works of this kind have been lately esteemed worthy the patronage of our worthiest nobles, I have made no doubt to prefer this of mine to your undoubted virtue, and exceeding true noblesse; as con-

taining matter no less deserving your reading, and excitation to heroical life, than any such late dedication. Nor have the greatest princes of Italy and other countries conceived it any least diminution to their greatness to have their names winged with these tragic plumes, and dispersed by way of patronage through the most noble notices of Europe.

Surprising as it is to find Chapman justifying his acts by quoting foreign precedent, it is much more surprising to find Massinger, at a period when the claims of dramatic literature should have been taken for granted, on two occasions deliberately echoing Chapman's plea. In dedicating his first printed play, *The Duke of Millaine*, to Lady Katharine Stanhope in 1623, Massinger informed her that if he were not fully assured "that workes of this nature hath found both patronage and protection amongst the Princesses of Italie", he would not have presumed to lay his play at her feet. And his epistle dedicatory to Robert, Earl of Carnarvon, in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, in 1633, begins in precisely the same strain.

If popular opinion really looked upon sovereigns and princes as the final arbiters of taste—and one seeks in vain for an alternative—the logic of the situation was that none but the King

had power to restore the discredited drama to its pristine glory. There was a juncture in Jacobite days when that *desideratum* was almost accomplished, and, had Dame Fortune been more propitious, the great genius who had laboured most to bring it about would have seen the early crowning of his efforts. When, in 1631, *Bartholomew Fair* was published for the first time, its title-page set forth that it had been "acted in the Yeare 1614 by the Lady Elizabeth's Servants. And then dedicated to King James of most Blessed Memorie; by the Author, Benjamin Jonson". Light is thrown on this statement by what Aubrey records when gossiping about its maker. "King James", he says, "made him write against the Puritans, who began to be troublesome in his time". Assuming this to be true, then there was a *raison d'être* for the lost dedication, made doubtless in a tendered transcript of the play written in Jonson's own neat hand. That the comedy was acted at Court soon after its production we very well know, since Jonson took care to publish the special court prologue and epilogue. Had the King but commanded it to be published shortly after, together with the dedication, the voice of Detraction would have been effectually silenced; but, if inspiration came

from Whitehall, it may be that the dedication revealed too much; at any rate the King made no sign. It must certainly rank amongst life's little ironies that when, years later, royal acquiescence was at last revealed, the effect was that of a damp squib. When, in 1651, Cartwright's tragi-comedy, *The Siege, or Love's Convert*, was posthumously published, it surprised by presenting a verse-dedication to the martyred king. It would seem that the play had been acted before Charles I during his final sojourn in Oxford, and that a manuscript copy of the text, suitably inscribed, had then been given to him. So unhappy, however, was the hour of publication that the innovation established no precedent. For all his interest in the drama and his influence on its trend, Charles II never signified to any of the dramatists of his time by hint or otherwise that he would be pleased to accept the dedication of any particular play. Eventually, it was the women of the blood royal who first awakened to the necessity of showing appreciative condescension. In 1693, Shadwell's comedy, *The Volunteers, or The Stock Jobbers*, was openly dedicated by his despairing widow to Queen Mary in terms of equal misery and obsequiousness. In 1697, Congreve laid his *Mourning Bride* at the feet of the Princess

Anne, and in the year following, Catherine Trotter did the same with her *Fatal Friendship*. Ill-patron as he was of the arts, it is not surprising that, in 1718, George I permitted Colley Cibber to inscribe to him his comedy, *The Nonjuror*, and gave him £100 in return for the compliment, for, as Tom Davies points out in his *Dramatic Miscellanies*, the play had been written "with a view to justify the doctrines inculcated by the Revolution, and to open the eyes of the prejudiced in favour of the house of Hanover". To signalise the honour done him, Colley issued an *édition de luxe* of the play, seemingly the first of its kind. It was printed, appropriately enough, on Royal paper, stitched in marble covers, and enhanced by gilt edges; and the price was a modest half-crown. But the whole affair was sheer anti-climax, for, by sapping and mining, the fortress had long since been overcome.

## Chapter VI

### A QUAINT OLD PLAYHOUSE TRICK

One of the amiable weaknesses of the London audience in the early seventeenth century was a liking for sly allusions to the characteristics of popular players, more particularly when it was so arranged that the oblique reference to an established favourite fell from the lips of the favourite himself. Much as one would be disposed to think that the catering for this sort of taste would be left to the clowns who said more than was set down for them—and there were many such, notwithstanding Hamlet's quiet remonstrance—this was apparently the exception not the rule. No self-respecting dramatist has ever been partial to verbal embroidery on his text, and, to obviate liberties of this kind being taken, the Pre-Restoration dramatist now and again went off at a tangent, and, as it were, supplied the comedian with the expected gags. This, in the heat of composition, he could very well do. Except in Caroline days, when the supercilious

courtier-playwright emerged and showed himself above sordid considerations, plays were merchandise commissioned for a particular company, and the author had to be conversant with the qualities of the players and provide them with suitable parts.

For the reason, perhaps, that many old plays have not come down to us, about the earliest known instance of this gratifying of the taste for adroit internal allusions of a personal order occurs in Cooke's *The Cittie Gallant*, as produced by the Queen's Men at the Red Bull in 1611. At a certain juncture in the play Scattergood suggests to his companions that they should pay a visit to the Globe Theatre. Bubble replies that he will go anywhere, "so the fool have a part: for i'faith, I am nobody without a fool". "Why, then", says Geraldine, "we'll go the Red Bull; they say Green's a good clown". To which Bubble responds, "Green! Green's an ass", adding, on being asked why he says so, "indeed, I ha' no reason; for they say he is as like me as ever he can look". The point of the equivoke here lay in the fact that Bubble was played by Tom Green himself, and played with so much gusto and acceptance that when the play came to be printed in 1614, not long after the much-loved

comedian's death, it was renamed *Green's Tu Quoque, or The Cittie Gallant*, in compliment to his memory and after the retaliatory catch-phrase that was for ever in Bubble's mouth. Few finer spontaneous tributes have since been paid to a popular favourite.

Seeing that he insisted on playing the lifelong rôle of *Athanasius contra mundum*, and, as a stickler for the proprieties, was never disposed to hold the candle to the devil, Ben Jonson is the last man one would expect to find indulging in witticisms of this order, yet he too, on more than one occasion, put his dignity in his pouch and yielded to the popular craving. Evidently the temptation to break out into apt playhouse allusiveness when he was writing the puppet-show scenes in *Bartholomew Fair* was too great to be resisted. But the curious thing is that allusiveness has been found in these scenes where it is not, and one particular allusion to a well-known actor wholly overlooked. It will be readily recalled by lovers of the Elizabethan drama that when the vacuous Cokes is astonished to find that Lanthorn Leatherhead's little players repose in baskets, he tells him he thinks that "one taylor would go near to beat all this company with a hand bound behind him". This silly remark has

actually been taken by sundry addle-pated pundits who are much given to "climbing o'er the house to unlock the little gate", to refer to Joseph Taylor, the actor, a member of the Lady Elizabeth's company who produced the play. But all that Cokes really meant, or was intended to convey, was that one tailor, although, proverbially speaking, but the ninth part of a man, could fight all the puppets with one hand tied behind him. The actual personal allusions in the scene come immediately after. First, Cokes asks Leatherhead which of his puppets is his Burbage, and, on the showman failing to understand the question, adds, "Your best actor, your Field?" an explanation which somewhat mysteriously evokes the comment from Master Littlewit, a bystander, "Good, i'faith! you are even with me, sir". As Nathan Field was certainly a member of the Lady Elizabeth's company in 1614 when they produced the play, there is little room for doubt that, as Professor T. W. Baldwin has surmised in *The Organisation and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company*, the point of Littlewit's remark lay in the fact that Field uttered it as Littlewit's representative. A little later comes the allusion which all the commentators have missed. In the course of his identification of the



Nathan Field  
(From the painting in the Dulwich Gallery)



puppets which are to appear in *Hero and Leander*, Leatherhead says, "And here is young Leander, is as proper an actor of his inches, and shakes his head like an Hostler". As it cannot be pretended that stablemen in Jonson's day were all afflicted with a trembling of the head, the only possible inference is that we have here an allusion to a distinguishing physical trait which marked the acting of William Ostler, an admired young player then a principal member of the King's Company, called by John Davies "the Roscius of these times", who died a couple of months after the production of the play, when he could have been no more than twenty-five. Jonson knew him well, for he had formerly been one of the members of the children's company at the Blackfriars, and had acted there in his *Poetaster* in 1601, not to speak of his subsequent appearance at the Globe in *Cataline*.

Two years later, when rare old Ben wrote *The Devil is an Ass* for another company, the King's Men at the Blackfriars, he contrived to ring the changes on the old playhouse trick. There is a scene in the second act of the play in which Meerecraft and Engine conspire to humbug Fitzdottrel by imposing upon him a skilfully disguised, gallant as a much-travelled, highly

accomplished lady, one capable of teaching his wife graceful deportment. Engine thinks it would be advisable to get a player to perform the trick. Some of them, he says, are very honest lads:

There's *Dick Robinson*,  
A very pretty fellow, and comes often  
To a Gentleman's chamber, a friend of mine. We had  
The merriest supper of it there, one night,  
The Gentleman's Land-lady invited him  
T' a Gossips' feast. Now he, Sir, brought *Dick  
Robinson*,  
Drest like a Lawyer's wife, amongst 'hem all;  
(I lent him cloathes) but, to see him behaue it;  
And lay the law; and carve; and drinke vnto 'hem;  
And then talke baudy: and send frolicks! o!  
It would have burst your buttons, or not left you  
A seame.

In the conversation that follows, Robinson is spoken of as an ingenious youth who dresses himself on the stage "Beyond forty o' your very ladies," and it is finally arranged that he shall be asked to do the trick. But it was of course impossible to introduce Robinson into the play *in propria persona*, despite the fact that he was then a member of the King's Company,<sup>1</sup> and we find

<sup>1</sup> See the excellent account of him given in Dr Edwin Nungezer's *Dictionary of Actors*. This corrects a long-prevailing misconception regarding the manner in which he met with his end.

that it was Wittipol, the gallant, who subsequently masqueraded as the Spanish lady. Incidentally, also, we learn that Master Wittipol was exactly of the same height as Robinson, and more than common tall. Naturally, the audience saw the joke, but it is not at all apparent to the present-day reader. The whole point lay in the fact that Robinson played Wittipol. Yet, Professor Baldwin gives it as his opinion in the book already mentioned, that Field was cast for that character, but without advancing any reason for his choice. Field was certainly a member of the King's Company at the time, but there is no record of his having ever impersonated a woman.

Jonson was so much given at this particular period to indulging in these playful theatrical allusions that they bubbled from his pen even when he was writing Court masques. There is a curious example in his *Masque of Christmas*, as performed at Whitehall on Twelfth Night, 1617. Venus figures in this holiday frolic as a deaf and misconceiving dresser, and her son Cupid as a bugle-maker's prentice. Asked "to depart" by old Father Christmas when she is holding forth interminably about her child, the degraded goddess replies:

Ay, forsooth, he'll say his part, I warrant him, as well as e'er a playboy of 'em all. I could have had money enough for him, an I would have been tempted, and have let him out by the week to the King's players. Master Burbage has been about and about with me, and so has old Master Hemmings too; they have need of him.

There is point in this, although it by no means lies on the surface. In Jacobean days all the speaking parts in Court masques and all the character-dances in the interspersed antimasques were performed by professional players, and it was not until the close of the entertainment that those of the blood royal and the nobility condescended to appear. The neatness of Jonson's allusion lay in the fact that the King's Company had at this time a monopoly of court-masque work, and that the little Dan Cupid of the moment, so far from having been sought for unavailingly by Burbage and Hemings, was already in their service.

Although Jonson shared this trick in common with the dramatists of his era, in one respect he was unique. He is the only one who refers directly to himself by name in a play. This he did twice in *The Magnetic Lady*. There are few parallels in later times, but it is noteworthy

that Mr Bernard Shaw names himself in the induction to *Fanny's First Play*. One remarks indeed a certain analogy of mental make-up and purpose between the two satirists. Believers in theosophy would probably account for this recurrence on the principle of reincarnation. Who knows?—it might well be the case. That would certainly explain why, when “G. B. S.” came to compare Shakespeare with himself, he felt heartily sorry for Shakespeare.

The old trick of making an actor allude to himself did not wholly pass away with the age that created it. There was always a possibility of its recurrence so long as the dramatist was habituated to write plays for a particular company. In his maturer days Colley Cibber was not above pressing it into service. There is a scene at the opening of *The Refusal* where Sir Gilbert Wrangle, a much-courted South Sea director, recounts to a couple of his friends how he is pestered by all sorts and conditions of people for allotments. “Let's see”, he says, “I would fain have another for you. Oh, here, William Pen-kethman, one thousand. Ha, a very pretty fellow, truly! What, give a thousand pounds to a player! Why, it's enough to turn his brain: we shall have him grow proud, and quit the stage upon it.

No, no, keep him poor, and let him mind his business: if the puppy leaves off playing the fool, he's undone". The humour of this lay in the fact that when *The Refusal* had its production at Drury Lane on St Valentine's Day, 1721, the part of Sir Gilbert Wrangle was played by Pinkethman himself. Although Pinky was apt to disconcert his cue-hunting associates by saying a good deal more than was set down for him, Colley Cibber had a great affection for the droll.

## Chapter VII

### THE ELIZABETHAN PLOTTER

Few people are aware that the scenario-writer who flourished so abundantly in the days of the silent films had his prototype in our own country in remoter times. In both cases it was a matter of necessity compelling. What we have first to bear in mind is that in the great Elizabethan era, collaboration in playwriting was more the rule than the exception. Those were the days when the good old stock system was first established, that system which was pursued uninterruptedly until a century ago, and, after a period of irregularity and experimentation, seems now about to be renewed. Companies then had permanency, and the players, banded together on the commonwealth principle, were their own masters. So far from playwriting then being a haphazard sort of business into which anybody might enter, it was recognised as a craft to which one had to serve a vague kind of apprenticeship, the possible brevity of the period of probation being in direct ratio with the skill evinced. In tailoring parlance,

there was no traffic in ready-mades, since all plays had to be made to measure. What the Printer says to the Reader in the foreword to the anonymous comedy of *The Two Merry Milkmaids, or The Best Words wear the Garland*, as published in quarto in 1620, reveals the long-prevailing conditions. "Every writer", he points out, "must governe his Penne according to the Capacitie of the Stage he writes to, both in the Actor and the Auditor". This practically meant that the working playwright had to cool his heels until a commission came along. Facility was then demanded of him, for he had to write at top speed. Though every London company well knew that a certain number of new plays would be wanted for each season, for some reason not apparent—possibly they preferred to wait on the chance of a good topical subject turning up—plays were seldom, if ever, commissioned much in advance, and it was rarely that more than five or six weeks was allowed for the writing. Disappointment in the circumstances was not to be thought of, and, whether the play was of one-man authorship or a work of collaboration, bonds had to be entered into for its due delivery.

Once one realises how hampering the exigencies must have been, there is no room for surprise

over the fact that the bulk of dramatic writing in Shakespeare's was of a crude, pedestrian order. The surprise is that, in the conditions, great drama should ever have emerged. But the chances are that Shakespeare himself, in confining the fruits of his labour to the one company, was rewarded by being held immune from the common rule, and given more elbow-room. In electing to stick obstinately to their self-imposed handicap, the Elizabethan players soon found that a commissioned play was all the more expeditiously written when the work was parcelled out to a number of authors. Five, we know, to have been the maximum, a fairly good indication, seeing that the Horatian five-act rule then obtained, that the allotment was by acts. Everything goes to show that the work had to be done to a minutely detailed scenario, nay, more, that the first move of the players when they desired a new play, was to approach some dramatist well known for his skill in plot-contriving, and commission him to compose a scenario in accord with their particular needs. An engrossing story, if well-schemed, was then half the battle. So clearly was this recognised that the plot had to be read by its deviser to the sharers (or principal members) of the company—generally in a tavern

—and agreed to before commissions for the writing of the play were given out. Whether or not the plotter did further work on the piece depended on the number of collaborators employed. If, say, three others were called in, he might write the first and last acts, or, if four, only a single act. Sometimes he did no more than provide the scenario.

To us, Elizabethan dramatic construction seems rather of a loose, desultory order; but it was certainly not a go-as-you-please affair, there was a system of sorts, and a certain standard had to be approached. So much stress was laid in the late sixteenth century on the necessity for good plotting that those who excelled in the work were patted on the back, gaining reputation for that sort of work alone. Robert Greene was the first English dramatist to be acknowledged a master craftsman in this line. When Gabriel Harvey, in 1593, sneered at his antagonist, Tom Nashe, as the mere echo of Greene, Nashe replied somewhat belatedly, in *Have with You to Saffron Walden*, three years later, by scorning the accusation, claiming that Greene was inferior to him in everything, “but plotting Plaies, wherein he was his crafts master”.<sup>1</sup> Greene’s mantle, in that

<sup>1</sup> *Nash’s Works*, edit. McKerrow, III, 131.

respect, seems to have fallen on Anthony Munday, for Francis Meres, in his important list of the principal living dramatists given in his *Palladis Tamia* in 1598, characterises Munday as "our best plotter". The distinction thus bestowed upon him largely accounts for the fact that Munday's name so frequently figures in the list of collaborated plays written for the Admiral's Men at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries. It was so high an honour that it won for him some years later the malice of Ben Jonson. The egoistic author of *The Case is Altered* took good care that no understanding person should remain in doubt as to whom was aimed at in the Antonio Balladino of that play. He makes that purely episodic character, (he appears in one scene only) say, "Let me have good ground, no matter for the pen; the plot shall carry it"; and Master Onion ironically replies, "Indeed that's right, you are in print already for the best plotter".<sup>1</sup>

There needs no ghost from the grave to tell

<sup>1</sup> First printed in 1609, *The Case is Altered* dates from 1597, but the play was revised several years later for performance at the Blackfriars, at which time the Antonio Balladino scene was added, probably in substitution for something else. See Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, III, pp. 357-8; also C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, *Ben Jonson*, I, pp. 305-6.

us that here is plain indication of a certain rankling in the mind. It seems now the height of absurdity to say it, viewing the vast difference in quality between the two, but Munday and Jonson had been in keen rivalry in the crucial days when Jonson's reputation was in the making, the days when both were employed as play-planners for the Admiral's Men. After failing as an actor, Jonson was anxious to establish himself as a dramatist, but his painful lack of facility, evidenced by the fact that it sometimes took him fifteen weeks to write a play, prevented him, at a time when most plays were written in collaboration and in haste, from getting employment as a collaborator, and forced him for the most part to concentrate on scenario-writing, a class of work for which he had undeniable gifts. Being nothing if not conscientious, and having arrived early at a deep sense of vocation and of the homage that should be paid to the Muses, he was incapable of doing slovenly work; and by sheer force of character, aided and abetted by a self-imposed handicap, he eventually won through. Jonson was among those rarer artists who, in his own phrasing, "torture their writings, and go into counsel for every word".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See under "Memoria" in his "Discoveries".



Ben Jonson  
(From the painting in the National Portrait Gallery,



Our first trace of Jonson in the capacity of scenario writer is in 1597, on December 3 of which year Henslowe records in his so-called Diary the loan to him of twenty shillings "Vpon a Bocke wch he was to writte for vs befor crymas next . . . wch he showed the plotte vnto the company". Nothing further can be gleaned regarding this play, and it is doubtful whether it was ever written, but Fleay has somewhat rashly assumed that the plot referred to was "bengemens plotte" upon which, as Henslowe records on October 28, 1598, Chapman had written "iectes of a tragedie" (completed two months later). This is to overlook the fact that there was then such an office as that of scenario-writer, and the assumption that Jonson had submitted only one plot to the Admiral's Men is idle.

Keeping in touch with the players by accepting commissions for the nice construction of plots for other and more facile authors to work upon, writing plays single-handed when he was vouchsafed sufficient time to execute the task conscientiously, Jonson, though living from hand to mouth, struggled on gamely. But he lacked the spirit of camaraderie and his intellectual arrogance aroused hostility in the ranks of his fellow-workers, who, even after success had come

to him with *Every Man in his Humour*, saw fit to taunt him openly with his handicap, though they little guessed that that handicap was self-imposed, the outcome of his resolution to give of nothing but his best. In 1601, when Dekker satirised him as Horace in *Satiromastix*, Tucca was made to assail his counterfeit presentment with "You nasty tortoise, you and your itchy poetry breake out like Christmas but once a yeare, and then you keepe a Revelling and Arraigning, and a scratching of men's faces, as you were Tyber, the long-tail'd Prince of Rattes".

In pre-Restoration days the plotter of a play, even if he did no more work upon it, was recognised, very properly, as one of its authors and, if and when the play was published, have his name included among the collaborators. To grasp this simple fact is to go a long way towards clearing up a mystery which has perplexed some of the most astute of Elizabethan scholars. Seeing that dramatic collaboration was wholly resorted to with the aim of shortening the period of composition, it is far from likely that Jonson, with his slow pen, was ever commissioned to take part in the actual writing of a play. Yet we find his name given as co-author on the title-pages of two comedies, *Eastward Hoe* and *The*

*Widow*. This has led to traces of Jonson being looked for where Jonson is not. Of all the notable scholars who have concentrated their searchlights on *Eastward Hoe* none but Cunliffe has been penetrative enough to arrive at the opinion that Jonson did no more than plot and supervise the play. (But he may also have written the prologue, as Parrott suggests.) Herford and Simpson, finding that the Quarto credits Chapman, Jonson, and Marston with the authorship of the play, look for traces of all three in the text, and are completely mystified:

Much of it is not specially characteristic of any of the three writers. Its admirable plot is built, as has been said, with a combined simplicity, lucidity, and strength of which none of the three was obviously capable. Jonson, by far the most powerful plotter of the three, was certainly capable of its strength. But neither he nor Chapman, the second in power, showed any care for the strong simplicity of which the ancient drama, more familiar to these two than to any of their fellows, might have given them a relish. Both were prodigals, too lavish of their immense resources to be content with the choice but temperate fare of *Eastward Ho*.

It will be seen that the attempt to analyse out the shares of the three reputed authors in the play yields no very far-reaching results. . . . While the analysis may claim to make certain all three did actually partici-

pate in it, the proportion of features, whether of invention or of technique which can be called distinctive is comparatively small. In other words, *Eastward Ho* must be regarded as one of the more remarkable among the known examples of successful collaboration. For not merely is the fact of collaboration to an extraordinary degree successfully concealed, but the alliance appears to have elicited a result superior in some features to the independent work, single-handed of any of the three.<sup>1</sup>

If analysis can do no better than this, then analysis is a broken reed. But the chances are that if Herford and Simpson had conceived that Jonson was no more than the plotter of the play and looked for no more than two styles in its text, the result might have been different. It is mightily curious that they should have ignored the association of Jonson's name with the writing of *The Widow*, particularly as that belatedly published play presents an analogous problem whose solution, when arrived at, will undoubtedly throw light on the other.

Published by Moseley in 1652, formerly acted by the King's Servants, *The Widow* was ascribed on the title-page to Jonson, Fletcher, and Middleton. This cannot be taken as mere guess-work, for the Quarto has an address to the reader

<sup>1</sup> Herford and Simpson, *Ben Jonson*, II, pp. 38 and 45.

by Alexander Gouge, who vouches for the accuracy of the attribution; and Gouge was in a position to know, for he had been a member of the King's Company from 1626 (when, as a boy, he was acting female parts) until the period of the silencing of the theatres. There can be little doubt that the play, though not originally produced by the King's Men, had finally passed into their possession. Scepticism, however, has arisen as to the accuracy of the assignment of its authorship to Jonson, Middleton, and Fletcher, for, when scholars came to analyse the text, most of them were inclined to attribute it to Middleton alone, and few could find any traces of Jonson or Fletcher.<sup>1</sup> It is not at all likely that with the transference of the play to the King's Men some revision of the text took place, but the alterations would hardly have been drastic enough to eliminate all trace of Jonson's and Fletcher's work, if work of theirs had been there. So far as Jonson is concerned, however, it never struck any of the investigators that his contribution to the whole was no more than plotting the play.

<sup>1</sup> For specific details, see E. H. C. Oliphant, *The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher*, p. 493. In this section of the book the whole question of the origin and fortunes of *The Widow* is minutely considered.

To conclude as much would be to get rid of a good deal of the difficulty. There is some reason to believe that Jonson had actually drawn up the scenario, but, before advancing the evidence on that score, it needs to say something about the origin of the play. Not having seen any reason since to change my opinion, I take leave now to cite what I contributed on the subject to my dead friend, E. H. C. Oliphant's *The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher*<sup>1</sup> ten years ago:

Reed dates the play 1616-20 on the strength of an allusion which might have been added in revision. The brief prologue is of the early Jacobean type, and refers to the play as "a sport only for Christmas". The bulk of the evidence points to a date *circa* 1607, and to production at a private theatre by boy players. One of the proofs is that the songs are sung by the characters, and not by a special singing boy. No company of boy-players was in existence in 1616-20. My theory is that the play came after *Eastward Hoe* at the Blackfriars, when, owing to the recent trouble, Jonson, Chapman, and Marston being no longer able to collaborate (they never worked together again), Jonson joined with Middleton and Fletcher in a play of London life, in which the characters were given foreign names and the scene laid in Istria. In *Eastward Hoe* Touchstone has a catch-phrase, "Work upon that now", and Security another, "I do hunger

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<sup>1</sup> Pp. 496-7.

and thirst to do you service". In *The Widow*, the Second Suitor uses "I have enough, and I will have my humour". The catch-phrase seems to have been in vogue in 1599-1606. See *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, and *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*. The play ends in the Jonsonian manner (as in *The Alchemist*) by a chief character coming forward to speak a tag-epilogue.

One important item of evidence associates Jonson with the plotting of the play. Though he borrowed freely from the ancients, who were then considered legitimate prey, he never stole from his contemporaries. Even if his resourcefulness had not precluded any such necessity, he had too many enemies ready to pounce on any such delinquency to take the risk. But he was economic of his material and not above borrowing from himself. Nothing of his was allowed to go to waste. A portion of his abortive masque, *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion*, was dovetailed into *The Staple of News*.<sup>1</sup> Now comes the important point. Gifford points out that there is a certain parallelism between part of the im-

<sup>1</sup> All the part from "Cook. O you are for the oracle of the bottle, I see" to "Poet. This fury shows, if there were nothing else; and 'tis divine" was inserted into act iv, sc. 2, of the play (ll. 8-40).

broglie in *The Widow* and part of *The New Inn*, the latter of which, it will be recalled, was damned on its production early in 1629. In *The Widow*, the girl Martia, when masquerading as a man, assumes the attire of her real sex, but what some of the characters take to be a disguise, with the result that when Francisco marries her he is laughed at by the knowing unknowing ones, but laughs best in being able to laugh last. So, too, in *The New Inn*, Frank, the supposed boy, assumes a second "disguise" in garments appropriate to her actual womanhood. The inference is that Jonson appropriated from his plot of the earlier play.

There still remain a good many questions about old-time theatrical procedure which cannot be answered. We do not know how long it remained customary for the plot of a commissioned play to be submitted to the company for ratification or amendment before the writing of the play could be proceeded with, nor can it be determined when the services of a special plotter ceased to be in demand. But on the point of general procedure, it is interesting to note that to the end of his long career, Jonson was habituated to the drawing up of an act-by-act scenario of his plays. This we know, because by a lucky chance a

couple of his later scenarios have come down to us.<sup>1</sup> One was prefixed to *The New Inn* when that unlucky play came to be printed in 1631, and the other, made for the incomplete, and possibly unfinished, pastoral of *The Sad Shepherd*, is preserved in the Jonson Folio.

<sup>1</sup> Almost a unique circumstance. A few Caroline plays have "Arguments" prefixed (e.g. Rowley's *All's Lost by Lust*, in 1633), but these, save in one particular instance, are devoid of act-divisions, and read like scenarios put into fluent narrative form. The exception is Nabbes' *Hannibal and Scipio* (1635), in which a curious piecemeal method is adopted, a portion of the argument being given before each act.

## Chapter VIII

### DEKKER'S THEATRICAL ALLUSIVENESS AND WHAT IT REVEALS

Though the fact has somehow escaped all observation, Thomas Dekker was one of the singularly few dramatists of the great Elizabethan era whose mannerisms were so individual that they enable the full-armed scholar to trace their hands with surety in plays of doubtful authorship wherein they have not been suspected. There was a period of a few years at the turn of the sixteenth century when that luckless but indomitable and serene spirit was obsessed by an urge to indulge in the quaintest of theatrical allusiveness in season and out, and had some difficulty in restraining that impulse.

Though the trait had shown itself earlier, it is most observable in his *Satiromastix*, that mordant counterblast to Jonson's *Poetaster*, which had first been acted by the Chamberlain's Men in the early summer of 1601, and, after being also presented by the Children of Paul's a few months

later, was entered on the Stationers' Register in November. This curious hotch-potch is replete with allusions to recent plays, all put into the mouth of Tucca, many of them obvious, some cryptic. Nowadays an intelligent reader of the play, even a scholar of parts, unless he were specially engaged in hunting for allusions of the sort, would certainly miss the allusion to *Cynthia's Revels* in the first scene of the fourth act where Tucca says:

So, now arise sprite with buttry; no, herringbone,  
Ile not pull thee out but arise deere Echo, rise, rise  
devil, or Ile conjure thee up.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the subject-matter of the satire, these allusions to recent plays come in more or less pat, but there are other plays of Dekker written before and after *Satiromastix*, in which these theatrical topicalities are dragged in, without rhyme or reason—providentially enough, for Dekker's rash yielding to his obsession enables me now to establish two facts: (1) his association with the anonymous comedy *Blurt, Master Constable*; and (2) the date,

<sup>1</sup> Uncommented upon in the notes to the play in Josiah H. Penniman's recension in one volume of *Poetaster* and *Satiromastix* (Boston, the Belles-Lettres series, 1913).

(1) It might be taken as a trifling circumstance that there are three allusions to popular plays in the fifth act of *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), all uttered by Simon Eyre, but when one finds not only instances of a similar sort of theatrical allusiveness in *Blurt, Master Constable*, but in them an actual repetition of the earlier phrasing, the coincidence, as Carlyle would have said, is "significant of much". Entered on the Stationers' Register on June 7, 1602, and printed in quarto shortly afterwards without indication of authorship, but with the intimation, "as it hath bin sundry times priuately acted by the Children of Paules", *Blurt, Master Constable, or The Spaniard's Night-walke* has, for many generations past, been commonly attributed, for no apparent reason, to Thomas Middleton, none, I think, save that recently deceased Australian scholar, E. H. C. Oliphant, dissenting.<sup>1</sup> But what has been no

<sup>1</sup> In 1750, when William Rufus Chetwood, the noted prompter-cum-bookseller, was cooling his heels in the Four Courts Marshalsea in Dublin, he strove to make a little badly needed money by reissuing the play in 12mo. To this he prefixed a very brief note on Middleton, styled "An Account of the Author", in which we are actually told that "We may judge of his *longaevity*, by his works; since his first play was acted in 1601, and his last in 1665".

more than slightly suspected, sensed rather than arrived at by any purposeful investigation, namely, that Dekker had a considerable hand in the play—can now be thoroughly established. No elaborate arguments is necessary: all one needs to do to achieve that end is to compare the theatrical allusions in the play with the theatrical allusions in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and *Satiromastix*:

(a) *Blurt, Master Constable*, Act II, 1:

*Laz.* I scorn to run from the face of *Thamar Cham*.

*The Shoemaker's Holiday*, v, 5:

*Eyre*. . . . Tamar Cham's beard was a rubbing brush to 't.

*Satiromastix*, v, 2, 192:

*Tucca*. No, whirligig, one of his faithfull fighters; thy drawer, O royll Tamor Cham.

(b) *B.M.C.*, Act II:

*Hip*. Sirrah Mephostophiles, did you not bring letters from my sister, to the Frenchman?

*S.H.*, Act v, sc. 4:

*Eyre*. . . . avaunt, avoid, Mephostopheles.

*Satiromastix*, v, 2, 357:

*Tucca*. . . . So, thou must run of an errand for mee, Mephostopheles.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the spelling of Mephostopheles is as in the German *Faust-buch*, not as in Marlowe.

Theatrical allusions apart, the following parallelism is not without its significance, seeing that Dekker afterwards entitled one of his pamphlets *Lanthorne and Candlelight*:

*B.M.C.*, Act iv :

*Cur.* And here it is, lanthorn and candlelight.

*Satiromastix*, iv, 3, 190:

*Tucca*. . . . Th' art a good rounçivall voice to  
cry lanthorne and candlelight.

The question now is, was Dekker the sole author, or did he only write part of the play? Unfortunately, there is not sufficient evidence to warrant a definite conclusion. Proceeding with caution, one might be disposed on the strength of the identity of the allusions to credit him with, say, the second and fourth acts. But there is another matter that requires to be taken into consideration, the authorship of the songs. There are five of them, and they are scattered through the last four acts. Not all are of any particular quality, but "Midnight's bell goes ting, ting, ting, ting" in act iv and "Love for such a cherry lip" in act v, have a good deal of that careless grace of style, what one might characterise artful artlessness, which marks Dekker's lyrics. On the whole, one sees no valid reason

why the play should not be taken as the work of single authorship.

## (2) THE DATE OF CHAPMAN'S "BUSSY D'AMBOIS"

In *Satiromastix*, iv, 1, 173, Tucca is to be found saying:

Goe not out, farding candle, goe not out, for trusty Damboys, now the deed is done. Ile pledge this epigram in wine, Ile swallow it, I, yes.

To me, the allusion here, *in its totality*, is as plain as a pikestaff, but scholarship in general, and without exception, has blundered over it badly. Frederick Gard Fleay is not looked upon to-day as a very dependable guide, yet, on this score, he has been constituted for many years past bell-wether to the flock. Unable to attach Tucca's allusion to Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* because in his opinion it dated after 1601, Fleay gave expression to the idea that the allusion referred to some earlier play on the same theme;<sup>1</sup> with the melancholy result that not a few Elizabethan investigators of eminence have been on a wild-goose chase after that earlier play ever since.<sup>2</sup> The outcome has been to seriously confuse

<sup>1</sup> *Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*, I, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> For details of the idle conjecturing on the subject, see Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, III, p. 253.

the issue: even in an age of scientific marvels one can hardly find what never existed. It will be an easy task for me to show that Tucca was not only referring to Chapman's play, much as we have it, but actually girding at its culminating feature, Montsury's illustrated similitude, which, in musical phrase, brought the tragedy to a full close.

*Busy D'Ambois* was entered on the Stationers' Register on June 3, 1607, and when it fell from the press shortly afterwards, contained the intimation, "As it hath been often presented at Paules". We know now that Chapman had been writing for the Paul's boys something more than four years earlier; for Professor C. J. Sisson's fruitful research, as ably marshalled in his *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age*, has revealed that his lost topicality, *The Old Joiner of Aldgate*, had been produced at Paul's on February 28, 1603. One racks one's brain in vain for any sensible reason that might possibly be advanced to show that Chapman could not have been writing for the same boy-players three years previously. It requires to be noted that, early in November, 1599, after some years of silence, the small select theatre of Paul's—notable as the first of the so-called "Private" houses—had been reconstituted





at the instance and expense of William Stanley, sixth Earl of Derby.<sup>1</sup> "Que diable aller faire dans cette galere?" one asks instinctively. Only a solitary answer to that question suggests itself, and it may be wrong. On the previous 30th of June one George Fenner had written to two of his correspondents that my Lord Derby was then "busy penning comedies for the common players".<sup>2</sup> Putting two and two together, what more natural than to suppose that Derby had revived the Paul's boys with the view of getting a ready producing place for his plays? But, on second thoughts, certain objections arise to give one pause. Fenner says his lordship was writing for "the common players", and the term cannot be taken to apply to a company of choir-boys. On the other hand, ever since his succession to the title in 1594, Derby had allowed a troupe of common players to figure as his servants and act under the privilege of his name, and, although this troupe had no London habitat and had to content itself with strolling, it eventually gave a

<sup>1</sup> G. B. Harrison, *A Last Elizabethan Journal* (1933), p. 50, where is cited from a newsletter of November 13, 1599, preserved in the Public Record Office, the important new fact that "My Lord of Derby hath put up the plays of the Children in Paul's to his great pains and charges".

<sup>2</sup> *State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth*, cclxxi, 34, 35.

performance before the Queen on February 5, 1600. Little wonder then that Chambers<sup>1</sup> is inclined to believe that Derby wrote his plays for the use of the company of adults bearing his name. If that were so, one can see no reason, beyond the mere gratification of a whim, why he should have gone to the trouble to revive the Paul's boys.

There is not a shred of evidence which, even by the most ingenious twisting, could be taken to imply that any play of Derby's was ever acted at Paul's. True, there are three anonymously issued Paul's plays, *The Wisdom of Dr Dodypoll*, *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, and *Histriomastix*, each distinctive in style, and all of which must have been produced within a few months of the re-opening of the house; and it is equally true that the paternity of the three has ever since gone a-begging; but it may safely be assumed that no scholar of repute will ever attempt to father one of them on Derby. If Oxford's only rival as a playwriting dilettante really financed the new Paul's organisation with the view of having his plays submitted to a select audience, we should expect to find some trace of the acting of a play of his by the Paul's boys shortly after the re-

<sup>1</sup> *The Elizabethan Stage*, II, 127.

organisation took place. Yet all that the most vigorous search can yield on the point is a curious item of evidence which goes to show that nothing of the sort had taken place. This item, seeing that it throws some light also on our main question, the date of *Bussy D'Ambois*, is doubly worthy of consideration.

Entered on the Stationers' Register on September 8, 1600, and published in 1601, the anonymous Paul's boys' satirical comedy, *Jack Drum's Entertainment, or The Comedie of Pasquil and Katherine*, has been rightly assigned by common consent to Marston. Internal allusions (to Kemp's morris dance to Norwich and what not) show that the play was produced late in April, 1600.<sup>1</sup> In the opening scene of the fifth act some curious conversation occurs regarding the policy recently pursued at the very theatre where the play was being acted. This must be cited in full:

*Sir Edward Fortune.* I saw the Children of Powles last night,

And troth they pleas'd me prettie well:

The Apes in time will doe it handsomely.

*Planet.* I' faith, I like the audience that frequenteth there

With much applause: a man shall not be chokte

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<sup>1</sup> H. N. Hillebrand, *The Child Actors*, p. 291; Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, iv, p. 21.

With the stench of Garlick; nor be pasted  
To the barmie Iacket of a Beer-brewer.

*Brabant Junior.* 'Tis a good gentle audience, and I hope  
the boies

Will come one day into the Court of requests.

*Brabant Senior.* I, and they had good Plaies, But they  
produce

Such mustie fopperies of antiquitie,  
And do not sute the humorous ages backs,  
With clothes in fashion.

If we are to take Brabant senior's criticism seriously, as I am thoroughly disposed to do, we must conclude that between the opening of Paul's in November 1599 and March 1600 no new play of any importance had seen the light there, and what plays had been revived were of a painfully antiquated order. Frank as is the avowal, it would scarcely have been so sweeping had any play whatsoever by the nobleman who had revived the theatre been acted there. Even Marston would have recognised the advisability of holding the candle to the devil. There is revelation, too, on other points. The assumption that Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* was produced at Paul's in 1599 (based on the most ridiculous "evidence" ever advanced in support of a theory)<sup>1</sup> must now go by the board, for Marston is not

<sup>1</sup> See Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, III, p. 1604.

likely to have sneered at his own play. The severity of the stricture also shows that *Bussy D'Ambois*, not being a musty foppery of antiquity, cannot have seen the light before March 1600, but, since it was certainly referred to in *Satiro-mastix*, when acted at the Globe in the early summer of 1601, the possible period of production can be narrowed down to the space of a few months. Viewing the fact that the private theatres in those days invariably closed down in the summer, it may be safely assumed that Chapman's play saw the light towards the close of 1600. Internal evidence (1, 2, 82) reveals that it was a leap-year production. Finally, to clinch matters, one must needs show that the best possible gloss on Tucca's pleasantry in *Satiro-mastix*, "Goe not out, farding candle, goe not out", is afforded by Montsury's address to his wife at the close of *Bussy D'Ambois*:

I do forgive thee, and upon my knees,  
With hands held up to heaven, wish that my honour  
Would suffer reconcilement to my love;  
But since it will not, honour, never serve  
My love with flourishing object till it sterue;  
And as this taper, though it upwards look,  
Downwards must needs consume, so let our love;  
As having lost his honey, the sweet taste  
Runs into savour, and will needs retain

A spice of his first parents, till, like life,  
It sees and dies; so let our love; and lastly,  
As when the flame is suffer'd to look up,  
It keeps his lustre; but being thus turn'd down  
(His natural course of useful light inverted)  
His own stuff puts it out; so let our love.

It is obvious that illustrative action accompanied this fine speech once it had got well under way. Candles were always ready to hand throughout the play in the early private theatres, which, unlike the open-roofed Bankside theatres, were exclusively candle-lit. But as Tucca hints—one wonders had there ever been an accident?—it would have sadly marred the pungency of Montsury's illustration if the candle had gone out as soon as he took it up.

## Chapter IX

### STAGE DUMMIES

When I muse over the transience of systems of stage presentation, I am apt, as theatrical antiquary, to adapt the well-worn French apothegm to my own particular point of view and murmur, "autres temps, autres accessoires". To consider the common run of stage "props" of one specific era in the history of the drama and then contrast the impression gained with one's knowledge of the common run of "props" in another era is to be struck by the diversity. Not wholly useless is the reflection, for it is indeed in this impermanence that the hollowness of that once infective shibboleth, "Shakespeare in modern dress", taken as a principle, lies. At best, it admits only of partial application. Swords are demanded in most of Shakespeare's plays, and swords are far from being common wear in our day.

One property in frequent use in the Middle Ages and after has all but disappeared from theatrical use: the dummy. No doubt this is

largely due to the steady march of humanitarianism. Not only have most of the barbarous customs of old been abolished, but mankind has grown too squeamish to suffer, much less enjoy, their mimic representation. Yet the time was when horrible sights, both on the stage and off, were the delight of the masses. Decapitation scenes and scenes of torture were rife in the old French mysteries and, in such, dummy figures had of necessity to be employed. They were technically known as "feints", and the term indicates how they were made to serve. It was simply a matter at the critical moment of adroit substitution. That nothing might be lacking in the conveyance of the illusion, great care was taken in the manufacture of the dummy, either as whole (where it was complete) or of the component parts. The severed head had a positively blood-curdling similitude. We have it on the authority of Gustave Cohen that the head was first carved in stone from the life, with the actor as sitter, then modelled in pasteboard, and, after being coloured with discretion, rendered hirsute.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, with the making of trunks there must have been a similar painstaking.

<sup>1</sup> Gustave Cohen, *Histoire de la Mise en Scène dans le Théâtre Religieux Français du Moyen Age* (1906), p. 48.

This, however, was by no means the genesis of the stage dummy. To arrive at that one must go back to the days of ancient Greece. In making the dummy so considerable a factor of their drama, the Elizabethans, if they had thought it worth while—only Ben Jonson would have troubled to do so—might have cited classical precedent for their course. It may be that Euripides was not the actual originator of the device, boldly as he had innovated, but it is certain that in his tragedy of *The Suppliants* a dummy figure did duty for Evadne when she was called upon by the dramatic exigencies to hurl herself from the palace roof on to her husband's funeral pyre. This was a particular kind of thrilling stage effect to which the Elizabethans were very prone. In Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris, with the Death of the Duke of Guise*, the body of the Admiral, after he has been murdered in an upper chamber, is flung down into the street, and carried off in obeyance to Anjou's command, "Away with him! Cut off his head and hands!" Doubtless an equivalent to this order was done before the body was brought in again and hung upon a tree: an act which would go to show that the dummy used had a well-joined but removable head and hands. There is good reason, indeed, to believe

that the Elizabethan property-makers were little, if anything, behind their precursors in the seeking of verisimilitude in these matters.

This casting down of bodies was pretty well done to death in the Marlovian period. In *Selimus*, an anonymous Queen's Men's tragedy of 1594, one unfortunate creature was hurled from an eminence, only to light upon the points of a circle of spears. In *Soliman and Perseda*, to increase the sensation, two living beings were thrown from the top of a tower, and fell with a dull thud on the boards.<sup>1</sup> But effects of this order soon suffered taboo, and for a very good reason. By the close of the century sitting on the stage had become so much *à la mode* with gull and gallant that all hurtling from on high became "most tolerable and not to be endured". As a matter of fact, effects of this particular order were not to be seen again until considerably after these poachers on the players' preserves had been banished from their coign of vantage.

All the same, the dummy had come to stay. Less thrilling but more serviceable and sensible

<sup>1</sup> Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, III, p. 57, note 4, overlooking the fact that dummies were employed, infers that real people were tumbled down, and says, "Presumably they disappear behind". Where, then, would have been the thrill?

methods of using it were found. Its presence in horrid guise gave a tang of vivid realism to many a Chronicle History, and there can be little doubt that Shakespeare's employment of it in this type of play ranked among the offensive things which compelled Voltaire to arrive at the conclusion that he had barbarous tastes. If one were to seek for any justification of that stricture beyond the blinding of Gloster, it could be readily found in *2 Henry VI*, act iv, in that scene wherein Walter bears off Suffolk, only to return within a couple of minutes with his severed head and dangling body, both of which he throws down contemptuously on the stage as so much offal. But it may be urged in mitigation of such offences that "the drama's laws the drama's patrons give", and that they are not so much indicative of Shakespeare's lack of taste as of his public's. St Amand, who first visited London in 1631, found that the English liking in serious drama was all for murders, battles, and bloodshed.<sup>1</sup> One takes this line of argument because Shakespeare was far from being alone in his exploitation of the horrible. To cite an instance thoroughly germane to our subject, one, however, considerably less gruesome than the exposure of Suffolk's remains,

<sup>1</sup> J. J. Jusserand, *Shakespeare in France*, pp. 124 ff.

though repugnant to the modern mind, take that scene in the last act of *Sir John Oldcastle*, where MacShane, the Irishman, comes in bearing the body of his murdered master, and calmly proceeds to rifle it of all its possessions.

But simulacra of the dead were not always so ruthlessly handled. There were, indeed, cases where they were not handled at all. It sufficed for the immediate purpose to make distant exposure of the corpse. In Marston's crudely powerful tragedy, *Antonio's Revenge*, a curtain was suddenly withdrawn in the opening act, and the suspended body of Feliche, "stabbed thick with wounds", shown to the unsuspecting court. An exposure of this sort in which the bodies of several strangled children were revealed to sight afterwards formed one of the cumulative horrors of *The Duchess of Malfi*. But, before we gibe at the Elizabethan liking for raree-shows, it might be as well for us to bear in mind that mobs all the world over are much of a muchness, that an excited gathering is sure to have resurgences of primitive man, and that, finally, we ourselves, "the heirs of all the ages in the foremost files of time", maintain a popular institution yclept Madame Tussaud's.

Shakespeare — wise man! — rarely innovated,

but he often bettered somebody else's innovation, and it is not astonishing to find, when one comes to look for the skilfullest use of the stage dummy made in Elizabethan times, that it is to him one must award the palm. *Cymbeline* presents the prime example. Note how Imogen's mistake is rendered credible when she emerges from her coma and finds beside her, as she thinks, the headless body of her husband. Emphasis has been laid early in the play on the similarity of physical build (but not of countenance) between Leonatus Posthumus and Cloten. To feed his particular spite, Cloten has arrayed himself in a stolen suit of Posthumus's clothes, and he is wearing this when he meets his end. To arrive at the climax, it is necessary for the rationale of Imogen's mistake that the head should be cut off and cast away from the body: the sole reason why an act of superfluous barbarity was committed. Clever, undeniably clever: but for once in a while we catch a glimpse of the strings working the puppets. It is interesting to note—more particularly as the fact has gone unobserved—that Congreve deliberately stole Shakespeare's device when he came to write the last act of *The Mourning Bride*.

With the Restoration a new era dawned alike

on the dramatist and the player. Innovation revolutionised the old concepts. Pictorial backgrounds were established, and the actress ousted the boy-player. In the circumstances it is not surprising to find that the old stage dummy fell into serious disfavour. Its use was only resorted to under the compulsions of an inevitable situation presenting an otherwise insoluble problem. Thus, classic precedent was closely followed by Dryden and Lee in the final scene of *OEdipus, King of Thebes*, where OEdipus commits suicide by throwing himself from a balcony, though something more than classic ingenuity was evinced in working out the situation. One has to ask oneself why, when the counterfeit presentation of the fate-driven king fell on the stage, it was at once surrounded by the Thebans and hidden from the audience's sight. What purpose did this serve, seeing that the regal corpse was eventually given full honours and borne off in solemn procession? Well, the secret is that, while it was a dummy that fell, it was not a dummy that was carried off. When the affrighted Thebans gathered round the body a trap was opened down which the dummy was thrust and up which came the actor of *OEdipus*, who had lost no time in hurrying down from his lofty

perch. To the perplexity of the audience, it was real flesh and blood that was given funeral honours.

The introduction of scenery shortly after the king came to his own again brought about a marked change in stage routine, and afforded solutions for sundry problems which had hitherto puzzled the players. Thus, a deliciously quaint method of showing a multiplicity of the dead without littering the stage with dummies was hit upon. The bodies were simply painted on the back flats. It was in this way that the streets were shown bestrewn with the plague-stricken dead in the opening scene of *Oedipus*, and in this way that the scene of various torturings in Settle's nightmare of a play, *The Empress of Morocco*, was brought home to the intelligence. Effects of this order were very properly relegated in after days to the panorama, but they served their purpose satisfactorily enough in Restoration times. Horrors which otherwise could not have been shown at all were impressed upon the mind in this non-illusive way. The dramatist was beginning to find short cuts: he was now relying upon the scene-painter's capacity to show what earlier authors had been forced to describe. The moral of Crowne's *The Miseries of Civil War* was

incidentally conveyed by two intercalated, but, so far as the plot was concerned, extrinsic, scenes wholly of this illustrative order. In the one, a group of soldiers were shown looting and raping at a country farm; and in the other a town appeared on fire, with bodies of men and women dangling from tree branches, and little children impaled on pikes.

But, if to-day we deplore the firm establishment of this convention in the Restoration theatre (and, in so doing, assume the same attitude of superior-mindedness towards them that they assumed towards the Elizabethans), it might be as well for us to bear in mind that, so far from the responsibility for its creation falling on our forebears, the principle had been derived from a foreign stage, then, and for long after, looked upon as the glass of fashion and the mould of form. Much earlier in the century the players of Paris had resorted to the use of the panoramic background—as one may style it for want of a better term—seemingly to the satisfaction of their public, though not always to the approval of their dramatists. Sometime after the event, D'Aubignac complained bitterly that when his mediocre tragedy, *La Pucelle d'Orleans*, was produced in 1642, the players contented themselves

by indicating the Maid's martyrdom in an obscure, badly painted picture, instead of giving a realistic representation of her agonies. Presumably, the worthy abbé thought they should have run the risk of sacrificing an actress by way of burnt-offering for the success of his miserable play.

In the old days, great care had to be taken in the handling of dummies (when they were handled), as the slightest mishance was apt to turn a serious situation into farce. Owing to a momentary and quite unusual act of carelessness on her part, the divine Siddons once had a painful experience of the sort. This happened at Drury Lane on December 29, 1798, the first night of Boaden's play, *Aurelio and Miranda*. In the fifth act of the piece there was a dungeon scene in which Miranda (otherwise Mrs Siddons) gains access to Agnes (otherwise Mrs Powell) and carries off her new-born child. Throughout the evening the play had been going none too well, and at this juncture there were some audible indications of disapproval which so upset Mrs Siddons's equanimity that she hastened to leave the stage, and, in her hurry, struck the wooden infant in her arms so violently against the proscenium door that its head came off and went rolling across the stage. To make matters worse,

at this very moment Mrs Powell had to say, and unfortunately did say, "Immortal powers, preserve my child!"

At a much later period, some very effective uses were made of the stage dummy, none more so, perhaps, than the one exploited at the Olympic in January 1850, in *Ariadne*, a play adapted from the French of Corneille in which Anna Cora Mowatt, a noted American actress, was the star. In this, when the climax came, the heroine, instead of falling upon a sword when she learned of the faithlessness of her lover, as in the original, leaped into the sea from a rocky eminence. To produce the necessary illusion, three Ariadnes, similarly attired and of an identical resemblance, had to be employed. In the first place, Mrs Mowatt, as the real Ariadne, was seen staggering along the shore after receiving the devastating intelligence that Theseus had set sail and gone for ever. Then a ballet-girl, as Ariadne the second, climbed the precipitous cliffs of the Isle of Naxos to catch the last sight of the receding vessel. For a moment she disappeared from view, and then she was seen to cast herself from the heights and fall into the surging waters below. That is, apparently: what really fell was a realistically fashioned dummy.

The illusion was complete. People used to go to the theatre night after night in the hope of finding out how the thing was done. But, though many watched the scene through powerful opera-glasses, nobody succeeded in piercing the secret. Mrs Mowatt tells us in her *Autobiography* that on the first night the realism of the scene was so intense that when Ariadne leaped from the rock, a man started up in the pit and exclaimed in a tone of genuine horror, "Good God! She has killed herself!" Regarding which, all one can say is that that man got good value for his money.

In the highly coloured melodramas so much in vogue at the transpontine theatres early in the last century there were a good many sensational scenes in which a dummy played a prominent part. It was all a question of deft substitution at the critical moment. As a typical instance one may cite from the book of the play the last scene in James P. Hart's *The Murder of the Glen*, as produced at the Royal Victoria Theatre (now familiarly known as "the old Vic"):

LAST SCENE. *All the borders up.*

*All across the stage represents the Mansion House.*

The house runs down to the lower apartments under the level of the stage. In front an area open some feet,

and iron palisades before it, next the audience. The roof of the house runs from the top out of sight, to the back; all the windows open; persons in them anxiously watching Luttrell, who appears at an upper one endeavouring to escape to the roof. He gets out, and with difficulty clammers on the top and disappears. Mob in front shouting. Soldiers enter, the mob point to the spot. The magistrate gives the order, the troops fire, the body of Luttrell is seen rolling down the roof and falls into the area. Mr Dwyer and Maria enter; soldiers run to the railing; a gate is forced open in them; they descend, and instantly return bearing Luttrell, his limbs apparently broken, and his trousers bloody, face smeared, etc. He is brought to the front dying.

Then, after a brief dying speech, somewhat reminiscent of the last agonies of Marlowe's Faustus, the curtain descends.

It is one thing to use dummies legitimately, as in this particular instance, and another to press them into service where they can be well done without. Charles Kean, in his zeal for spectacular effect, made the mistake of not recognising the fine distinction. In the late eighteen-fifties, when Ellen Terry had the good fortune to be chosen to play Puck at the Princess's Theatre in Kean's revival of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, she was somewhat superfluously supplied with a double.

The result was that one night disaster came. The rest must be told in Ellen Terry's own words:

When Puck was told to put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes, I had to fly off the stage as swiftly as I could, and a dummy Puck was whirled through the air from the point where I disappeared. One night the dummy, while in full flying action, fell upon the stage, whereupon, in great concern for its safety, I ran on, picked it up in my arms, and ran off with it amid roars of laughter. Neither of the Keans was acting in this production, but there was someone in authority to give me a sound cuff.<sup>1</sup>

Harking back to Jacobean times, one recalls that there was a scene in the fifth act of Fletcher and Massinger's *Sir John Olden Barnaveldt* in which a scaffold was thrust out for Barnaveldt's execution and the corpse of Leidenberg brought in and hung on a gibbet. Spectacles of this order were not uncommon in those days both on the stage and off, but, as indicative of the progress of squeamishness with us with the passing of the centuries, one may refer to the short shrift given to a new play by Tom Taylor at the Croydon Theatre on August 26, 1874, mostly because it presented a scene of a similar order.

<sup>1</sup> Ellen Terry, *The Story of my Life* (1908), p. 18.

In an article entitled "Fifty Years at the Play", contributed to *The Theatre* magazine of October 1894, E. J. Goodman writes:

I was one of a small audience that witnessed at the Croydon Theatre a drama of Jacobite times called *The White Cockade*. It was a production wholly unworthy of the clever author; but one of its incidents alone was enough to condemn it. It will be hardly believed that a dramatist so experienced could have introduced such a spectacle as that which was presented in, I think, the last act to the eyes of the horrified and disgusted audience. The scene was a wild heath or moor, and in the foreground on one side of the stage was erected a solid gallows from which a property corpse was seen hanging in chains.

On this score, it is only in the immortal tragedy of "Punch and Judy" that the traditions are preserved. This deprivation of one of the dummy's old-time utilities serves to remind us that as the years sped along towards the dawn of the present century there was less and less employment of its services. In the days when tea-cup and saucer comedy, *opéra bouffe*, and burlesque jostled each other in bidding for the popular suffrage, the venerable, once indispensable property lay neglected in the lumber-room. Occasionally it was brought out at Christmas-time to undergo the last humiliation and be kicked about by Clown

and Pantaloons, but the hour came when even that degrading service was denied it, for the Clown and Pantaloons were themselves thrown into the discard. But, just when extinction threatened the poor dummy, a miracle happened, and the humble was exalted. From the days of ancient Greece down to the close of the Victorian era, the old, unconsidered property had been no more than a trivial auxiliary in dramatic action, but it was now to prove germinal, a source of dramatic inspiration. High imagination brought to it the Promethean spark. In 1910 Percy Mackaye, the American dramatist, wrote a play of fantasy and sad romance called *The Scarecrow*, in which the inanimate figure of the furrows was endowed with life by witchcraft and took its place as the leading dramatic character. It had considerable success then in the United States. Nor was that the end of the story. In 1933, a play springing from the same root idea was produced with due marks of acceptance at the Gate Theatre, Dublin. It was the work of Mr Denis Johnson, and was called *A Bride for the Unicorn*, and in it a shop dummy came to life.

## Chapter X

### THE ORIGIN OF BULLS

Two associated minor problems of something more than passing interest patiently await their solution. For generations past, the curious-minded in the English-speaking world have been exercising their intelligence with the hope of determining how it chanced that a contradiction in terms came to be called a bull; and, correspondingly, the over-sensitive, if maligned, Irish have been fruitlessly pondering the question why they, of all people, should, by popular English acclaim, have been accorded a monopoly of bull-making, seeing that blundering of the sort has never been a marked characteristic of their race. Of this second riddle no one has attempted a reading, but there have been some fearful and wonderful solutions of the first. Smilingly, one recalls how, after sundry others had had a shy at this popular Aunt Sally without achieving the cocoa-nut, John Payne Collier, that Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde of Victorian scholarship, settled the point thoroughly to his own satisfaction. When

engaged on the pleasant task of recording for the first time the text—if so it can be called—of the immortal tragedy of *Punch and Judy*, Collier had occasion to note down that, after he had been thrown by his horse, *Punch* told the *Doctor* that he was killed, but corrected his statement on the *Doctor* demurring by saying, “Not killed, but speechless”. This inspired the following confident footnote:

A good deal has been written on the etymology and meaning of what is called an Irish *bull*, of which we have here a specimen; some have supposed it to be derived from a ridicule of the Pope’s *bulls*, etc., etc.; but its origin is very simple: a *bull* is a blunder; and only let the reader pronounce the two first letters of the word *blunder*, and he has immediately the true etymology—*blunder*, or *per ellipsis bl.* Milton correctly defines a *bull*, when he says it “takes away the essence of that which it calls itself” (*Smectymn. Apology*), but rather before the time when he flourished it seems to have been almost synonymous with a jest. Thus in Shirley’s *Gamester*, 1637, act III, Hazard says to Wilding:

He will talk desperately  
And swear he is the father of all the *bulls*  
Since Adam: if all fail, he has a project  
To print his *jest*s.

*Wilding*. His *bulls* you mean.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Punch and Judy* (with Cruickshank’s illustrations), 6th edition, 1881, p. 80.

Shirley's comedy was licensed for acting in November 1633 (Collier gives the date of printing), and the occurrence in it of the term *bull* in the sense of a humorous blunder is, if I mistake not, the earliest use of it on record. But, if we are to take the word here as synonymous with a jest, it can only be on the assumption that a factory had sprung up for the making and dissemination of bulls, just as there has been a factory in recent times for the concoction of schoolboys' howlers. That is conceivable enough, for in 1637 there fell from the press a collection of humorous anecdotes bearing title *A New Book of Mistakes, or Bulls with Tales, and Bulls without Tales, but no Lyes by any Means.* (All home-raised, too, not an Irish-bred bull among the lot.) As a source of fun, bulls were certainly popular about this period, so much so that they were deliberately introduced into plays. In Brome's fantastic comedy, *The Antipodes*, as acted at Salisbury Court in 1638, there is a scene in the fourth act in which one of the characters blunderingly says that he had once acted "a dumb speaker" in a play, causing his companion to respond with "Dumb speaker! that's a bull. Thou wert the bull, then in the play, would I had seen thee roar!" Then the stupid one wakes up and

retorts, "That's a bull, too, as wise as you are". Bulls, however, had cropped up in stage dialogue long before they were known as such (if one may momentarily beg the question). Dondolo, in Marston's comedy, *Parasitaster, or the Fawn*, a Blackfriars production of 1605, acquits himself of a healthy specimen when he conveys the news that "Tiberio, the Duke of Ferrara's son, excellently horsed, all upon Flanders mares, is arrived at the court this very day, somewhat late in the night-time".

Cocksure as he was in advancing his reading of the riddle, Collier was as wide of the mark as any of his predecessors. Etymology had nothing to do with the case. It will not be difficult to show that the new gloss put on the old word in the early seventeenth century had a distinct theatrical origin.

In 1605 there was built at the upper end of St John Street in Clerkenwell, a common play-house which was known from the plot of ground on which it stood—perhaps formerly occupied by an inn—as the Red Bull. Frequented throughout its course by citizens and the meaner sort of people, its fare was homely and unpretentious, and although that fare was often provided by dramatists of capacity like Heywood and Dekker,

the gallants of the time elected to poke fun at it, wilfully exaggerating its occasional banalities. In conversation, the house was seldom given its full style and title, being commonly referred to as the Bull, an ellipsis of which we get echoes in contemporary verse. Thus, we find Wither writing in his *Abuses Stript and Whipt* in 1613:

His poetry is such as he can cull  
From plays he heard at Curtain or at Bull.<sup>1</sup>

As for the persistent ridicule of Red Bull drama, it was a case of give a dog a bad name and hang him. Though the supercilious patrons of the Blackfriars were not sufficient visitors at the Clerkenwell house to be able to cull a posy of howlers with any regularity, assuming that the growth was abundant, they were never short of pabulum, for where experience stopped short, invention stepped in. Some idea of the consistency of their attitude is to be obtained from a *jeu d'esprit* published in *Wit and Drollery* in 1653, under title "A Bull Prologue", and generally attributed to Sir William Davenant. One is puzzled to know whether the heading here was

<sup>1</sup> For an example in 1638, see J. Q. Adams, *Shakespearean Playhouses*, p. 302, and for another in 1653 (from Cokain), see Bradley and Adams, *The Jonson Allusion Book*, p. 303.

intended to mean a Red Bull prologue or a prologue of bulls, or whether it was a punning description designed to convey both meanings, but one is disposed to think that the double conveyance is the more likely. The whole silly effusion recalls the delightfully misspoken prologue to "the tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love, Thisbe", only to show that Shakespeare could do this sort of thing infinitely better:

You that do sitting stand to see our play,  
Which must this night be acted here to-day;  
Be silent, pray; though you aloud do talk,  
Stir not a foot, though up and down you walk;  
For every silent noise the players see  
Will make them mute, and speak full angrily;  
But go not yet, until you do depart  
And unto us your frowning smiles impart;  
As we most thankless will appear  
And wait upon you home; but yet stay here.

But the most important item of evidence on the point came a decade earlier, in early Commonwealth days, when the theatres had not long been silenced. Its value lies in the fact that it associates the Red Bull with bull-making. Writing in 1645, in his character-sketch of *A Country Committeeman*, Cleveland, the Cavalier poet, says:

He is *persona in concreto* (to borrow the solecism of a modern statesman). You may translate it by the Red Bull phrase, and speak as properly, "Enter seven devils solus".

Even if we go so far as to assume that the stage direction cited was genuine (which I very much doubt) the conventional bias here is obvious, for there was no particular reason why the Red Bull should be singled out as the home of blunders of this particular kind. Because of a sadly slipshod use of a stage technicality, bulls are to be found in fifty per cent of the plays produced in Elizabethan times, no matter what the theatre. "Enter" at the beginning of an old stage direction did not always mean what it said. A character who was disclosed to view by the drawing of a curtain equally "entered" with one that walked on. The result, in the reading, is often very whimsical. In Greene's *Scottish Historie of James the Fourth*, we encounter such a gem as "Enter the Countess of Arran, with Ida, her daughter, in their porch, sitting at work". Of much the same type is the "Enter Strumbo, Dorothie, Trompart, cobling shoes and singing" in *Locrine* (ii, 2). Even in Caroline days the precedent was still followed. In the third act of Ford's *'Tis Pitty she's a Whore* we get the full-

bodied example, "Enter the Friar in his study, sitting in a chayre, Annabella kneeling and whispering to him, a Table before them with wax lights". Prevalent as these bulls are in Elizabethan drama, it comes nevertheless with a shock of surprise to find that Shakespeare himself is not immune from these infelicities, though modern editors have taken the precaution to conceal the horrible fact. In the belated first quarto of *Othello*, 1, 3, a direction reads, "Enter Duke and Senators, set at a Table with lights and attendants".

There can be little doubt that rank social prejudice born of intense pride of caste was at the bottom of this constant ridicule of Red Bull drama. It had little or no justification. At first sight it seems odd that the slur cast on the Clerkenwell house and its authors as prime disseminators of bulls, should, at a much later period and with no more sense of justice, have been transferred to the Irish people, but, on further consideration, a certain parallelism in the matter of origin is to be found between the two. If a narrow sort of pride and prejudice gave rise to the one, a broader sort of pride and prejudice gave rise to the other: that innate feeling of national superiority which has ever formed part

of the Englishman's mental make-up. One may deprecate the quality, but it has carried him far. At no period of their country's history have the Irish people, whether of the Gael or the Pale, ever been given to the perpetration of bulls. So far as they can be said to have a national idiosyncrasy, it is of another order. When in loquacious mood, the average Irishman is apt, through sheer rapidity of thought, to resort to Shakespeare's trick of mixing his metaphors, a habit which puzzles and amuses the phlegmatic, slow-thinking Englishman. It was to this marked Hibernian characteristic that Boswell referred when he said of Goldsmith that "he had no doubt a more than common share of that hurry of ideas which we often find in his countrymen, and which sometimes produces a laughable confusion in expressing them". It would be a poor argument to advance the name of Sir Boyle Roche in support of the libel that has been put on his race, for, as in the case of Spoonerisms and their creator, not a tithe of the utterances attributed to him ever fell from his lips. It is true that he once said in the course of a speech in the Irish Parliament that it was impossible for him to be in two places at once, unless he were a bird, but to indulge in a superior-minded laugh over that

is to show one's ignorance, for he had done no more than give utterance to a semi-proverbial old English saying. Since it is to be found in cold print in the third act of Jevon's famous farce, *The Devil of a Wife*, whose popularity dates from 1688, it was a pity that Sir Boyle did not save his fame by emulating the habit of Rover in *Wild Oats* and adding, "Quotation!"

It is a significant fact that one may "squander one's useful leisure" in searching in the English drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, roughly from Shakespeare to Congreve, noting Irish characterisation and Irish allusiveness wherever they occur, and yet not find a single bull-making Irishman nor any reference to the Irishman's possession of any such propensity. This is no rash assertion: it is based on personal experience.<sup>1</sup> There was ample room and verge enough for the depiction of a blundering Teague in Jonson's *The Irish Masque* had any such type been then familiar, yet there is not a bull in the whole entertainment. Very curious this, seeing that there were a good many unhappy Gaels

<sup>1</sup> For the first fruits of my inquiry into the matter (some of them garnered before they were ripe), see the paper on "Irish Characterisation in English Dramatic Literature", in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for August 1890, pp. 178 ff.

then in England eking out a precarious existence and speaking what to them was a foreign language. The truth of the matter is that it was not until the last decade of the seventeenth century that bull-making was looked upon otherwise than as a weakness to which Englishmen were prone. Humorously enough, once that proclivity was foisted upon poor Paddy that admission was no longer made.

Much as it fostered the monstrosity, it is not to the stage that we must give the discredit of having originated the Stage Irishman. He was a transplantation from another soil. Although the point has been disputed on the strength of fallacious evidence, there was no trace of him on the boards for a full decade after the year of grace, 1690, when a book of jests which fell from the London press succeeded somehow in permanently besmirching Irish character in fastening upon it traits foreign to its nature. In this, as I shall presently show, we have the *fons et origo* of Paddy the bull-maker. Owing to incautious *a posteriori* reasoning and reliance on deceptive evidence, the truth about the matter has long been obscured. It has been maintained that the bull-making low-class Irishman dates from the production of Sir Robert Howard's long-popular

comedy, *The Committee*, at the Vere Street Theatre in October 1662. Since the genuinely amusing character of Teague, the faithful Irish servant, in this was drawn from the life and from a particular individual,<sup>1</sup> any proof that he was given *originally* to the perpetration of bulls would go far towards establishing that the English-speaking Gael of the time was remarkable for blunders of the sort. But that is precisely what cannot be advanced. What has been flagrantly overlooked is that in the course of revival in the eighteenth century tampering with the character of Teague took place to make it square with the stage Irishman of the hour. In the edition of the play issued in Bell's British Theatre series in 1792, Teague is represented as singing two songs, one of them as replete with bulls as the "Bull Prologue" already cited, but neither is to be found in the original folio of 1665. A collation of the two texts reveals that the insertion of the song of solecisms occasioned some addition to the dialogue. It would be difficult to say exactly when the play underwent sophistication, but it is important to note that neither song has a place in the editions of it issued in 1728 and 1733.

<sup>1</sup> Montague Summers, *The Playhouse of Pepys*, p. 266, note 110.

When, then, did this English change of attitude towards the Irishman take place? It dates from the publication in 1690 of a popularly hailed chap-book with the long-tailed title of "*Teagueland Jests, or Bog Witticisms*. In Two Parts. The First being a Compleat Collection of the most learned Bulls, Elaborate Quibbles, and Wise Sayings of Teagueland till the year 1688. The Second contains many Comical Stories and famous Blunders of those *Dear Joys* since the late King James's landing among them". Books of jests were greedily devoured in the old days by all sections of the community,<sup>1</sup> and this particular one had a double appeal inasmuch as it pandered to the political bias of the hour. Of its lasting influence on the public mind there can be no doubt. The clinging aspersion thus put on Irish character was the aftermath of the Revolution, a modicum of the price paid by Ireland for its loyalty to James II.

In the beginning the bull-making Paddy of the boards was a sop to Cerberus, a politic endorse-

<sup>1</sup> The widespread vogue of the *Book of Mistakes*, issued in 1637 (*vide supra*), is demonstrated by the reference to it in Brome's *The New Academy, or The New Exchange*, act iv, sc. 1. The book that Nehemiah says has made a man of him is described as "a book all of Bulls, Jests and Lies, collected by an A. S. Gent".

ment of popular misconception. By an irony of circumstance, it was an Irishman—no less a person than George Farquhar—who first thrust him behind the footlights, but something, though not very much, may be said in mitigation of his offence. It is true, as has been said, that in 1702, his Teague in *The Twin Rivals* trod in the footsteps of his namesake in Howard's forty-year-old comedy, but he was no mere simulacrum, since he occasionally showed glimmerings of his possession of an individual identity. Unlike his prototype, he is a bull-maker, but one only of an intermittent and spasmodic order. He blunders in that way on three occasions only, and then, too, as it were, of malice aforethought. There is a glaring inconsistency between this momentary obfuscation and his resourcefulness and rich mother-wit. It would really appear that Farquhar, in infusing into the old Teague type a new element which he thought the London playgoing public looked for, approached his task half-heartedly and with his tongue in his cheek. The problem was to play up to the popular misconception of Irish character, and yet maintain the Irishman's self-respect, and he solved it. Wit and bull-making are incompatible, yet Teague shows a pretty wit in the making of his. What

could be subtler than his comment on hearing a woman's shrieks within, "Fet it is shome daumsel in distress I believe, that has no mind to be relieved". It may be that the insertion of the thin end of the wedge was inevitable, but the misfortune was that an Irishman should have done it. Farquhar's acceptance of the libel gave authority to others to drive it home.

## Chapter XI

### NEW FACTS FROM SIR HENRY HERBERT'S OFFICE BOOK

Fully to demonstrate that the scholarship of to-day is of an unexampled thoroughness and excels all that has gone before in scientific methods of attack, it only needs to dwell upon the appalling story of the flagrant mishandling of Sir Henry Herbert's Office Book on its discovery in the penultimate decade of the eighteenth century. It may be predicated that any old manuscript of equally important bearing on early dramatic history that should come to light now would be transcribed with meticulous accuracy, provided with a lambent excursus, and published in its entirety without much delay. That is precisely what did not happen in 1789 when Herbert's valuable Office Book was discovered in a mouldering condition in an old chest at Ribbesford, near Bewdley, the former seat of the Herberts, and, though really State property, placed for a time by its nominal owner, Francis Ingram, Deputy

Remembrancer in the Court of Exchequer, at the disposal of Edmond Malone. Ranking as the soundest Shakespearean scholar and most accomplished theatrical antiquary of his time, Malone was undoubtedly the most fitting person to deal with the document, and his attitude towards it is therefore all the more extraordinary. It is true that so far as it was decipherable, he made a transcript of its contents, but some of the items were copied—or perhaps one should say quoted—with characteristic carelessness, and, notwithstanding his knowledge of the prime evidential value of the register, he never gave it in its entirety to the world. No miser secretly gloating over his gold could seemingly have been more covetous. While it is only fair to admit that he published some of the items in the book in his essay on *Shakespeare, Ford, and Jonson*, and others in his *Historical Account of the English Stage*, still, when all is said, it is doubtful whether he allowed the world to share more than half his treasure. By a lucky chance, however, George Chalmers, a few years later, obtained a loan of the old Office Book, and, much to Malone's annoyance, published further extracts from it in his *Apology for the Believers in the Shakespeare Papers* in 1797. Since that all trace of the book has been lost.

For over a century scholarship had to content itself with these scattered and far from readily discoverable excerpts, but in 1917, Professor J. Quincy Adams of Cornell University generously facilitated future investigators by collecting all the published details from the lost register, whether citations or summaries, in a skilfully annotated and well-indexed volume entitled *The Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert*. Than this, few more serviceable tools are to be found in the theatrical historian's workshop.

A few years later, fortune willed it that I should take up the running. In 1923, while making an examination of the Malone Collection in the Bodleian, I had the great happiness to retrieve several more or less important items from Herbert's old Office Book. It came about in this way. Malone had the bad, if useful, habit of disfiguring his books with annotations, and was, indeed, so far its victim that he even permitted his facile quill to glide over a margin or two of his First Folio. Conceive of my delight on finding that on the fly-leaves of several of his old quartos as well as in the notes in one or two interleaved handbooks, the great Elizabethan scholar had providentially preserved sundry extracts from Herbert's book which neither he nor Chalmers

had given to the world. Much excited over the discovery, I lost no time in writing an elucidative article embodying all the new data—an article which the editor of *The Times Literary Supplement* was considerate enough to publish in its issue of November 29, 1923. As the *T.L.S.* is, to my personal knowledge, extensively perused by scholars the wide world over, I naturally hoped that the information presented would be availed of by historical investigators when the occasion permitted. But I was doomed to suffer disappointment. Two instances will suffice. Notwithstanding what I had established about Lodowick Carlell's *Osmond the Great Turk*, when Professor Allardyce Nicoll came to edit the play in 1926 for publication by the Golden Cockerel Press, he had so far forgotten what I had written that the best he could do was to conjecture that the play had been produced at Salisbury Court between October 1637 and 1642. Slips of memory are, of course, not uncommon: they happen even to people like myself who are blessed with fine mnemonic powers. On that score pardon must be granted to the late Mr G. Thorn-Drury, who, in his recension of *The Poems of Thomas Randolph*, failed to avail himself of my discovery regarding Randolph's *Amyntas*, which he dated "after

1632".<sup>1</sup> These oversights brought home to me with telling force that no weekly journal, let its status and circulation be what it may, can give permanence or, after the passage of time, ready accessibility, to new data; and they afford some justification of the reprinting of what would otherwise prove ephemeral studies on important points in book form. Accordingly, I deem it incumbent upon me to give now a repetition of the details originally published in the *T.L.S.* and in much the same form.

### I. "OSMOND THE GREAT TURK"

In Malone's interleaved copy of Isaac Reed's recension of Baker's *Biographia Dramatica* (1782) —wherein it is incidentally revealed that Malone and Steevens were both contributors to the book —one finds in Vol. II, opposite page 268, and referring to item No. 71, "*Osmond the Great Turk*, otherwise called *The Noble Servant*, 8vo, 1657":

In the Office Book of Sir Henry Herbert is the full entry now before me, made by his predecessor, Sr. John Astley:

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<sup>1</sup> One has to be thankful for small mercies. This oversight was pointed out by Mr B. E. C. Davis in his review of the book in *The Modern Language Review* for April 1930. At least one scholar had treasured up what he had read.

"Item 6 Sept. 1622, for perusing and allowing of a new play called *Osmond the Great Turk*, which Mr Hemmings and Mr Rice affirmed to me that Lord Chamberlain gave order to allow of it because I refused to allow at first, containing 22 leaves and a page. Acted by the King's players . . . 20s."

The details here given regarding Lodowick Carlell's (possibly first) play have a curious diversity of interest. Not only are they eloquent of Carlell's position at Court, but they show that he began writing at a period somewhat earlier than has hitherto been suspected. Astley's record of the precise length of the manuscript was doubtless made in accord with a system either devised by himself or by one of his predecessors to prevent additions to the text after licensing. It cannot be found that Herbert followed any such system. Apparently, his method of keeping a check upon the players was by insisting upon the delivery to him of a fair copy of the play after it had passed through his revising hands.<sup>1</sup>

As Hemmings and Rice were members of the King's Company, the mention of their names in the entry shows that this company were the

<sup>1</sup> J. Q. Adams, *The Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert*, p. 35.

producers of the play. There is reason, indeed, to believe that all of Carlell's plays were originally brought out by the King's Men. But just here one encounters a difficulty. Belatedly printed, *Osmond the Great Turk, or The Noble Servant* forms one of the "Two New Playes" issued in quarto by Humphrey Moseley in 1657, the other being *The Fool would be a Favourite, or The Discreet Lover*. Besides the general title, each has a separate one, but the general title alone intimates "as they have been often acted by the Queen's Majesties Servants with great applause". So far as *Osmond the Great Turk* is concerned, one is disposed to question the accuracy of this statement. Since the King's Men jealously guarded their property and were not in the habit of parting with any of their plays to other companies, it is only possible to admit the correctness of the intimation on the assumption that Carlell was among the first of the Caroline courtier-wits who allowed their plays to be acted free of charge; and that, after having given the King's Men the privilege of performing *Osmond the Great Turk* for a considerable period, he withdrew the play, and accorded a similar permission to the Queen's Players. Of the other play one can say nothing, as there is no evidence to go upon.

## II. "THE CHANGELING"

On the flyleaf of his copy of Middleton and Rowley's tragedy, *The Changeling* (quarto 1653), Malone has written:

Licensed to be acted by the Lady Elizabeth's Servants at the Phoenix, May 7, 1622.

Our earliest previous record of the play is on January 4, 1623-24, when the same company (then styled more accurately by Herbert "the Queene of Bohemia's Company") performed it at Whitehall before Prince Charles.

## III. "THE SPANISH GIPSY"

Inscribed in Malone's hand on the flyleaf of his copy of Middleton and Rowley's comedy, *The Spanish Gipsy* (quarto 1653), is the following:

Acted by the Lady Elizabeth's Servants at the Phoenix, July 9, 1623, as appears by the Office Book of Sir Henry Herbert, then Master of the Revels.

This is inaccurately put. Malone, in paraphrasing from Herbert, had an ugly trick of giving the date of licensing as the date of production, although there is no reason to suppose they were ever identical.<sup>1</sup> One may safely assume, however,

<sup>1</sup> For other examples of this inaccuracy, see J. Q. Adams, *Dramatic Records*, p. 32, note 1.

that most plays were produced within a month of their licensing. *The Spanish Gipsy* was acted at Court by the Lady Elizabeth's Men on November 5, 1623.

It will be readily recalled that H. Dugdale Sykes, in his *Sidelights on Elizabethan Drama*,<sup>1</sup> disputes the attribution of this play to Middleton and Rowley, and makes out a strong case for the authorship of Ford. But, as running counter to this, one may safely assume, without laying any particular stress on the evidence, that had Herbert given Ford's name as whole or part author of the play, Malone would have noted the discrepancy.

#### IV. "THE MUSES' LOOKING-GLASS"

Opposite the memoir of Thomas Randolph in his interleaved copy of Langbaine's *Account of the English Dramatic Poets*, Malone writes:

*The Muses' Looking-Glass* was not printed till 1638 (at Oxford by Leonard Litchfield and Francis Bowman), but the title-page has only "by T. R.", without any preface or mention of the theatre where it was acted. But it was acted by the Children of the Revels under the title of *The Entertainment* in the summer of

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<sup>1</sup> Pp. 182-99.

1630 and licensed by Sir Henry Herbert, November 25, 1630.

Since one gains the impression here of some blundering, it is important to note that Malone repeats the second and more important part of his statement on the flyleaf of his copy of the play:

It was licensed by Sir Henry Herbert under the name of *The Entertainment*, November 25, 1630, and it appears from his office book that it had been acted in the summer of that year.

As the licensing was for performance, not for printing, seeing that publication did not take place until eight years later, the difficulty is to know how the usual procedure became reversed, and the play licensed a month or two after it had been acted. One is loth to accuse Malone of an iterated blunder, and, after all, there may be a way out. A London production before licensing would have incurred sundry pains and penalties, and, as a matter of fact, a London production in the summer of 1630 was a sheer impossibility. Every public place of amusement was closed by royal proclamation on the 17th of April, and remained closed for almost seven months. It was a period of plague. On October 29 following, we find Sir Thomas Roe writing from St Martin's



**Sir Henry Herbert**  
(From the painting by Dobson in Powis Castle, Montgomeryshire)



Lane to the Queen of Bohemia, lamenting that there had been no plays for a full six months, though that, he added, "makes our statesmen see the good of them. If our heads had been filled with the loves of Pyramus and Thisbe, or the various fortunes of Don Quixote, we should never have cared who made peace or war but on the stage".<sup>1</sup>

Formerly I expressed the opinion that with the closing down of their new theatre in Salisbury Court on the outbreak of the plague, the Revels Company went into the country and there produced Randolph's as yet unlicensed play. But such a procedure, in its totality, was altogether unprecedented and now appears to me highly improbable. Armed with the knowledge conveyed by Malone's two memoranda on the subject, Dr G. C. Moore Smith subsequently advanced a more rational solution of the problem in saying that "*The Muses' Looking-Glass* had probably been produced at Trinity [College, Cambridge] before it was taken over by the Revels Company, and some of the scenes we have were perhaps written after the original performance".<sup>2</sup> To some

<sup>1</sup> *State Papers, Domestic Series, Charles I*, 1630.

<sup>2</sup> *Review of English Studies*, I, 1925, No. 3, p. 309, article on "The Canon of Randolph's Dramatic Works".

such production, whether by university students or regular players, the epilogue printed with the play seems to bear testimony. It is certainly not of the type of ordinary playhouse epilogue. Remark the manner in which the audience is addressed:

You've seen *The Muses' Looking-Glass*, ladies fair  
And gentle youths: and others too whoe'er  
Have filled this orb.

While "gentle youths" would not have been an unfitting term to apply to the bulk of a school or collegiate audience, it would have sounded ridiculous in a theatre mostly frequented by gallants about town and inns-of-court men. It is noteworthy, moreover, that to determine where *The Muses' Looking-Glass* had its first production would also be to determine where *Amyntas* was first produced, for in the epilogue to the pastoral the "gentle youths" are again addressed, and there is also a like curious use of the term "orb".

Though the epilogue to *The Muses' Looking-Glass* seemingly mentions the title of the play, the play was never given at Salisbury Court save under the vague designation of *The Entertainment*. In Sir Aston Cockain's *A Chain of Golden Poems*, published in 1658, are some lines "To

my friend, Mr Thomas Randolph on his Play called *The Entertainment*. Printed by the name of *The Muses' Looking-Glass*<sup>1</sup> in which Cockain speaks of his pleasurable recollections of the play and of his desire to see it again. This indefiniteness in the titling seemingly points to an original university production. With a becoming modesty, Randolph was in the habit of styling the plays he wrote for performance by the Cambridge students "shows". It was thus with *Aristippus* and *The Peddler*, and in the introduction to *Hey for Honesty* we read:

We meant it but a show; if more it be  
Your kind acceptance christens it Comedy.

Malone's proof that *The Muses' Looking-Glass* was licensed for the Children of the Revels and therefore played by them at their new house in Salisbury Court, goes to confirm Fleay's shrewd deduction from the allusions in its opening scene to new playhouses that the current opinion that the play had been brought out at the Blackfriars was sadly astray, and that the place of production must have been Salisbury Court.<sup>2</sup> The presence

<sup>1</sup> P. 98.

<sup>2</sup> F. G. Fleay, *Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*, II, p. 166.

of these allusions indicate that either the play was written for London production, or, if first produced by University amateurs, considerably revised later. Since, in any case, it dates from 1630, its known period affords us some clue to the year, say 1631, in which William Hemming's "Elegy on Randolph's Finger" was written, seeing that that witty poem has a neat allusion to the play:

And which was worse that lately he did pen  
Vile things for pygmies 'gainst the sons of men.  
The righteous man and the regenerate  
Being laught to scorn by the reprobate.<sup>1</sup>

#### V. RANDOLPH'S "AMYNTAS"

Also opposite the memoir of Randolph in his interleaved copy of Langbaine, Malone has written:

*Amintas* was licensed by Sir Henry Herbert, November 26, 1630. It was acted by the Children of the Revels, see his Office Book.

In other words, Herbert, on two successive days licensed two plays by the one author for

<sup>1</sup> William Hemming's "Elegy on Randolph's Finger", edit. G. C. Moore Smith, II, 195-8.

the one company. So far as records go, this was altogether unexampled. Companies were not in the habit of submitting more than one play at a time to the licenser, as it was usual to allow some interval to elapse between the production of new pieces. Evidently both of Randolph's plays had been acted somewhere in the country previously, either by the Children of the Revels or by University amateurs. But, in case any doubt should be expressed about the accuracy of Malone's memorandum—and the circumstances are so remarkable as to warrant hesitation—one hastens to point out that some proof exists of the production of *Amyntas* at Salisbury Court late in 1630. As published in 1638, the pastoral bears the notification, "as acted before the King and Queen at Whitehall"; and we know from the Lord Chamberlain's books that a warrant was issued to William Blagrove on January 24, 1634-5, granting him payment of £30 for three plays given by the Children of the Revels at Whitehall in 1631.<sup>1</sup> Of a surety, *Amyntas* must have been one of the three.

<sup>1</sup> *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft*, XLVI, 1910, p. 97, Mrs C. C. Stopes on "Dramatic Records from the Privy Council Registers, James I and Charles I".

## VI. "THE HOLLANDER"

Published in quarto in 1640, less than a lustrum after its production, and evidently, from what follows, under what was originally its sub-title, Henry Glapthorne's play, *The Hollander*, was described then as "A comedy, written 1635 and now printed as it was then acted at the Cockpit in Drury Lane by their Majesties' Servants with good allowance. And at the Court before both their Majesties". Seeing that the play has a dedication from the author to Sir Thomas Fisher, and was therefore issued at his instance, we are compelled to take this statement as authentic. Yet we find Malone, in a note written on the flyleaf of his copy of the quarto, disputing its accuracy on the strength of an entry in Herbert's Office Book transcribed by him but never published:

For the Queen's Company. For a new play called *Love's Tryall, or the Hollander*, this 12 March 1635, £2. 0. 0.

At first sight Malone was certainly justified in entering his demurrer. Let us first grasp that March 1635 in Herbert means 1636, new style. At that precise period Queen Henrietta's Com-

pany was in occupation of the Cockpit under the management of Christopher Beeston, the owner of the theatre. On the other hand, as against the accuracy of the statement in the quarto, no company was then in existence whose exact style and title warranted their being referred to as "their Majesties' Servants". That description evidently refers to the new company first known as "The King's and Queen's Young Company of Players", which was established by Beeston at the Cockpit in 1637, and was afterwards commonly known as "Beeston's Boys".

Here, the discrepancy is glaring, but the two statements can be reconciled, and that despite the fact that both are correct. The circumstances must have been much as follows.<sup>1</sup> Lent came on the heels of the licensing of *The Hollander* to the Queen's Men, and before they were ready to produce the play, the plague paid one of its many visitations to London and brought about a closing down of the theatres on May 10.<sup>2</sup> Permission to reopen was not granted until February 23, 1636-7, and in the interim the

<sup>1</sup> My obligations here must be expressed to Professor T. W. Baldwin's *Organisation and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company*, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Collier, *Hist. Eng. Dram. Poet*, 1831, II, 74-6.

Queen's Men disbanded. Late in 1636, the King commanded Christopher Beeston to establish a new company of juvenile players, and gave permission for them to be called the King's and Queen's Boys; and, no time being lost in obeying the command, two performances were given at Court by the new company in the following February.<sup>1</sup> It may be that *The Hollander* was given on one of these occasions, for we know that Beeston's Boys acquired quite a number of the Queen's Men's plays. It is true the play does not appear either under its original title or its subtitle in their play-list of August 1639,<sup>2</sup> but the list is not exhaustive, and does not include Ford's *The Lady's Trial*, which was published that year "as acted by both their Majesties' Servants at the Private House in Drury Lane".

## VII. "THE OLD COUPLE"

Opposite the account of Thomas May in his annotated Langbaine, Malone records of *The Old Couple*, an excellent comedy first printed in quarto in 1658 without mention of the producing company or place of performance:

<sup>1</sup> J. Q. Adams, *Shakespearian Playhouses*, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> Collier, *op. cit.* II, p. 92.

Acted first in 1636, as appears by the Office Book of Sr. Henry Herbert, of which I have made a copy, June 22, 1789.

He might have used his copy to more advantage, though perhaps, after all, nothing material has been lost. Providentially, another note of his in the second volume of his Langbaine enables me to make sense out of one of Chalmers' muddles. In his transcriptions from Herbert, Chalmers more than once created difficulties for future investigators by running two entries together, although how he managed to do it passes understanding. Here is the most flagrant example:

1623, October 17. For the King's Company. An Old Play, called, *More Dissemblers besides Women*: allowed by Sir George Bucke; and being free from alterations was allowed by me, for a new play, called *The Devil of Dowgate, or Usury put to Use*: Written by Fletcher.<sup>1</sup>

This is a proper muddle. In the original a second entry under a different date began after "allowed by me". One arrives at this conclusion after reading Malone's note:

<sup>1</sup> J. Q. Adams, *Dramatic Records*, p. 26. See also p. 30, item "1624, Nov. 3" for another example.

*The Devil of Dowgate, or Usury put to Use*, by Fletcher, was acted by the King's Servants, October 27, 1623. See Sr. H. Herbert.

Here, Malone is at his old trick of giving the date of licensing as the date of production, but, at any rate, he enables us to read Chalmers's riddle. But, since nothing whatever is known now of the play, it was apparently damned offhand.

## Chapter XII

### PLAYWRITING FOR LOVE

The darkest hour ever experienced by the workaday English dramatist came in the Caroline period, not many years after Shakespeare was laid to his rest. Fell circumstances conspired to rob him of his modest livelihood and all but succeeded in the attempt. The menace came from a host of aspiring dilettanti, all of whom were content to give their plays to the players gratis, and some of whom even went the length of paying them to bring them out. Though the sympathy of the players was with the professional authors, whose capacity was known, the temptations held out to them, backed up as they were now and again by powerful influence, proved irresistible. Broadly speaking, the poachers on the orthodox dramatist's preserves were of two classes, courtier-wits, and ambitious young scholars from the two Universities anxious to obtain a foothold at court. Granted a fair measure of ability, both could reckon upon some measure

of royal support. Henrietta Maria (as it happened much to Mr Prynne's disadvantage) had a penchant for acting in pastorals, and encouraged the more gifted of those in her train to write plays of that sugary, highly artificial type. Nor was this all. Owing to another of the Queen's predilections a cult of platonic love had been established at court, and, either at the King's suggestion or with his approval, plays came to be written by divers courtier-poets in exemplification of its refining qualities. Initially acted for the most part at Whitehall at the royal expense, these plays were generally given subsequently to the producing companies for public use in one or other of the select theatres. Thus, Lodowick Carlell's *The Deserving Favourite*, after it had been performed at court in 1629 by the King's Men, was also acted by them for a time at the Blackfriars.

But the cloud on the professional dramatist's horizon had lowered somewhat earlier. Already the University amateur had come on the scene. In Shirley's sparkling comedy, *The Witty Fair One*, as acted at the Cockpit in 1628, Violetta finds occasion in the course of the fourth act to say that there are excellent poets about town, a remark which evokes from Sir Nicholas Treadle

the biting inquiry, "In the town? What makes so many scholars then come from Oxford and Cambridge, like market women, with dossers full of lamentable tragedies and ridiculous comedies, which they might have vent to the players, but they will take no money for them". Which probably means that the players preferred to acquire indefeasible rights in a play by the old-fashioned method of purchase, though they eventually swallowed their scruples.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, however, by this time the University amateurs had got an innings, else Shirley would hardly have considered them worth powder and shot. Unfortunately for him and his class, their plays were not all ridiculous or lamentable, as the bare names of Randolph, Marmion, Cartwright, and Jasper Mayne testify. Neither indignant protest nor keen satire had any power to check the steady tramp, tramp of the invaders, and in 1636, his mind made up for him by a serious outburst of plague, Shirley set sail for Ireland in the hope of vending his wares in the Dublin market.

But mere rivalry was not all. The gravest aspect of the menace to the professional author

<sup>1</sup> There is an earlier jibe at "gentlemen poets" in Jonson's *The Staple of News*, iv, 1, but it may be that the courtier-wit is here aimed at.

remains to be spoken of. The Caroline dilettanti were no believers in a fair field and no favour. Not content with the advantage gained by giving their plays to the players for nothing, they banded together to destroy the work of those who were compelled to write plays for a living. To damn a new play meant a considerable loss both to the author and the producing company, for the system of recompense which then obtained involved the payment of a lump sum on delivery of the manuscript, together with the concession to the author of the net profits of the play's second day of performance. Accordingly, a dead set against any author meant the inevitable loss of his employment. This actually happened to Ben Jonson. In a bleak hour when he was in the decline of his powers and feeling the pinch of poverty, the dilettanti fell upon him and smote him hip and thigh. Probably a recollection of his past achievements might have gained for him a little respite had he chosen to preserve a discreet silence, but Jonson was nothing if not a fighter, and he lost no opportunity of expressing his profound contempt for the amateurs. His parting shot at the enemy was fired in the induction to *The Magnetic Lady*, when that ill-received comedy was produced at the Blackfriars in 1632. Damplay

in this, it will be remembered, asks the attendant for the theatre-poet, and is asked in return, "Which of them, sir? We have divers that drive that trade now, poets, poetaccios, poetasters, poetitos".

In England at this period there were cliques which echoed and applied the sentiments of Gaillard when he wrote contemptuously:

Corneille est excellent, mais il vend ses ouvrages;  
Rotrou fait bien les vers, mais il est poète à gages.<sup>1</sup>

In the eyes of the Caroline dilettante the fact that he worshipped the Muses without mercenary aim placed him on a superior plane to that occupied by the man who wrote for money, and implied his possession of a virtue which he felt justified in proclaiming from the housetops.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Foix never looked for payment, and Rochon de Chabannes renounced all claim in connection with his pastoral, *Hylas et Sylvie*. At a much later period, Beaumarchais asked for no return for his *Deux Amis* and his *Eugenie*, but, much to the indignation of the comedians, insisted upon getting the usual pound of flesh when he supplied them with *Le Barbier de Séville*. Having arrived at the conclusion that gratuitous supply was unfair to writers by profession, he remained resolute on this score, but bestowed all his profits on charities. So, too, in Italy, Gozzi gave his early plays to the comedians free.

<sup>2</sup> The idea that it was vile to write for money persisted in some circles until a century ago. In Scott's racy introduction to *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822) the Captain and the Author engage upon a lively discussion of the point.

In the prologue to *The Launching of the Mary, or the Seaman's Honest Wife*, an indifferent play acted in the summer of 1633, and existing now only in an ill-written prompt copy, one finds William Mountford, the author, boasting to the audience that he had forborne from taking money out of his piece "by setting yt to sale". Upon this superfluous, and not to say invidious, notification, the changes were subsequently wrung by other amateurs. In the epilogue to Sir Aston Cockain's *The Obstinate Lady*—a play written about 1634 but not printed until much later—it is said of the author:

He wants no money, as the case now stands,  
Yet prays you to be liberal of your hands.

In 1638, when Jasper Mayne's bright comedy, *The City Match*, was acted at the Blackfriars after being performed at Court, a deliberate insult was given to the professional dramatists in general in its supercilious prologue:

Whether their sold scenes be dislik'd, or hit  
Are cares for them who eat by th' stage and wit.  
He whose unbought muse did never fear  
An empty second day or a thin share;  
But can make th' actors, though you come not twice  
No losers since we act at the King's price.

But, when the initial expense had not been defrayed out of the royal exchequer, the players sang a different tune. Note the plea in the epilogue to Denham's *The Sophy*, when that tragedy was produced at the Blackfriars late in 1641, just as the great Elizabethan dramatic era was about to come to an abrupt close:

Gentlemen, if you dislike the play,  
Pray make no words on't till the second day  
Or third be past; for we would have you know it,  
The loss will fall on us, not on the poet  
For he writes not for money.

A gentle way, this, of conveying that the author belonged to the noble army of dilettanti!

After the silencing of Ben Jonson none of the hard-pressed professional writers had courage enough to attempt belling the cat save Ben's old servant and pupil, Richard Brome, and he but belatedly. When that play of mysterious authorship, *The Careless Shepherdess*, generally misattributed to Thomas Goffe,<sup>1</sup> was revived at the Salisbury Court Theatre in 1638, it was preluded by an induction, evidently from Brome's pen. In this, several typical playgoers are shown

<sup>1</sup> See my article on "The Authorship of *The Careless Shepherdess*" in *The Times Literary Supplement* of July 24, 1924.

in the act of entering the playhouse to see the performance. Thrift, a citizen, after asking, "Sir, was't a Poet or a Gentleman that writ this play", goes on to say:

The Court and Inns of Court

Of late bring forth more wit than all the tavernes,  
 Which makes me pity playwrights; they were poore  
 Before, even to a proverb; now their trade  
 Must needs go down, when so many set up.  
 I do not think but I shall shortly see  
 One poet sue to keep the door, another  
 To be prompter, a third to snuff the candles.

There is no exaggeration here of the distress experienced. Even Philip Massinger, *facile princeps* among the dramatists of the hour, had suffered the oppression of the courtier-clique, and was partly dependent upon the bounty of a patron. Two years later<sup>1</sup> Brome returned to the assault at the Cockpit in a play called *The Court Beggar*. Remark what Courtwit tells Mendicant of his dramatic schemes:

And my project is that no Playes may be admitted to the Stage but of their making who professe or

<sup>1</sup> *The Court Beggar* is said, on the title-page of the belated quarto, to have been acted in 1632, but there are reasons for doubting this. The text, as we have it, was either written or revised in 1638. See my *The Elizabethan Playhouse and Other Studies*, second series, 1913, pp. 122-3; also J. Quincy Adams, *Shakespearean Playhouses*, p. 361.

indeavour to live by the quality; that no Courtiers, Divines, Students at Law, Lawyers-Clerks, Tradesmen or Prentices be allow'd to write 'em, nor the works of any lay-Poet whatsoever to be receav'd to the Stage, though freely given unto the Actors, nay though any such Poet should give a summe of money with his Play, as with an Apprentice, unlesse the Author doe also become bound that he shall doe true and faithful service a whole Tearme.

Already, in the prologue to his play, Brome had girded at those gentlemen-poets who,

. . . in the way

To purchase fame, give money with their play.

Yet you sometimes pay deare for't, since they write  
Lesse for your pleasure than their own delight.

But, not content with these two passing shots at the enemy, he must needs give them a broad-side at the close. In the epilogue to the play, spoken by six of the characters, Swaynwit is given a long concluding speech in prose which begins by expressing disdainment for the usual abject pleading on behalf of the author. "Why should we?" he asks:

Has he not money for his doings, and the best price too—because we would ha' the best. And if it be naught, why so, the poet has shewn his wit and we our manners. But to stand and beg for reputation

for one that has no countenance to carry it, and must ha' money is such a pastime. If it were one of the great and curious poets that give these playes as the Prologue said, and money too, to have 'em acted; for them indeed, we are bound to ply for an applause, because they look for nothing else, and scorn to beg for themselves. But then you'll say those playes are not given to *you*; you pay as much for your seats at them as at these, though you sit ne'er the merrier nor rise the wiser—they are above common understanding; and tho' you see for your love, you will judge for your money—why so, for that too you may. But take heed you displease not the ladies though, who are partial judges, being brib'd by flattering verses to commend their playes; for whose faire cause, and by their powerfull voyces to be cry'd up wits o' Court, the right worshipfull Poets boast to have made those enterludes, when for ought you know they bought 'em of University scholars tho' and only shew their own wits in owning other men's.

To all this there came from one of the superior-minded crew a quick and terse rejoinder. When Thomas Rawlins, the chief engraver to the Royal Mint, published his tragedy of *The Rebellion* shortly afterwards—it had achieved a run of nine days at Salisbury Court in 1636—he begged the reader in a preliminary address to “take notice of my name, for a second work of this nature shall hardly bear it. I have no desire to

be known by a threadbare coat, having a calling that will maintain it woolly".

With the coming of the Civil War a truce had perforce to be declared between amateur and professional, but the rivalry was renewed with zest at the Restoration, not without a certain bitterness on the one side, though hardly with the old contempt on the other. It is true that Samuel Clyat, in the commendatory lines pre-fixed to the Hon. James Howard's comedy, *All Mistaken, or The Mad Couple*, in the quarto of 1672, saw fit to say of its author that he courted his muse "neither for gain nor dower"; but the age had acumen and sensibility enough to see that the work of professional authors like Dryden, Shadwell, and Otway commanded respect. It only remains to be said that the slowing down of the great Elizabethan impetus synchronised with, and, to some extent, was occasioned by the emergence of the Caroline dilettanti. The great public for whom all the greatest plays in English literature had been written began to lose interest in the theatre which slowly degenerated into a sort of court appanage, and it was not until the close of the century that it became once more a thoroughly democratic institution. The verdict of posterity made ironic comment on the futility

of the Caroline amateurs' pretentiousness, for, of all the plays then written, only one, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, the work of Massinger, one of the despised professionals, held the stage until recent times.

Although his mother had pioneered the way, Charles II lives in history as the first reigning English monarch to go publicly to the play. That fact is not without its significance, for once he had become a regular playgoer and had begun to evince a highly intelligent interest in the well-being of the drama, not sycophantic courtiers alone, but men of the highest rank and standing turned their thoughts to writing for the theatre. Two dukes and a fair sprinkling of lords figure not inconspicuously in Restoration dramatic annals. The line bade fair to stretch out till the crack o' doom, and it is not surprising that the galled jades, nay even the high-mettled racers, winced. What Dryden thought about the irruptions of Buckingham, Newcastle, Orrery, and the four Howards, not to speak of others of their kidney, may be gleaned from his reflections on dilettanteism in the preface to *All for Love* in 1678:

Men of pleasant Conversation (at least esteem'd so)  
and indu'd with a trifling Kind of Fancy, perhaps

help'd out with some smattering of *Latin*, are ambitious to distinguish themselves from the Herd of Gentlemen, by their Poetry:

*Rarum enim ferme sensus communis in illâ  
Fortundâ.*

And is not this a wretched Affectation, not to be contented with what Fortune has done for them, and sit down quietly, with their Estates, but they must call their Wits in question, and needlessly expose their Nakedness to publick View? Not considering that they are not to expect the same Approbation from sober Men, which they have found from their Flatterers after the third Bottle. If a little Glittering in discourse has pass'd them on us for witty Men, where was the necessity of undeceiving the World? Would a Man who has an ill-title to an Estate, but yet is in possession of it, would he bring it of his own accord, to be try'd at *Westminster*? We who write, if we want the Talent, yet have the Excuse that we do it for a poor Subsistence; but what can be urg'd in their defence, who not having the Vocation of Poverty to scribble, out of meer Wantonness take pains to make themselves ridiculous.

Similarly, we find Nat Lee saying in the prologue to his *Constantine the Great* in 1683:

The Poet and the Whore alike complains  
Of trading Quality that spoils their gains,  
The Lords will write, and Ladies will have  
swains.

The Restoration dilettanti hit upon a method of preserving their status and their self-respect without bribing the players by making them presents of their plays. The players had still to hand over the profits of the author's third night, but it was usual to bestow them on a second person. There was a certain improvement in this, as the players were no longer tempted to produce a weak play by the lure of getting something for nothing. But, until one pierces the secret, it surprises to find a distinguished amateur dramatist giving the profits of one of his plays to a professional rival, even although there was a friendship between the two. There can be little doubt that when, in 1687, Sedley bestowed the pecuniary return from his Drury Lane comedy, *Bella-mira, or The Mistress*, upon Shadwell, the gift was little better than conscience money, for, although the fact was never acknowledged and has escaped observation, the play was much more Shadwell's than Sedley's, and infinitely superior to any play Sedley wrote unaided. (There is reason to believe, also that Shirley acted as "ghost" once or twice to the Duke of Newcastle.)

Curiously enough, Vanbrugh, though he had to earn his living, looked for no profit from his

plays. As he had a quick pen and a lively imagination they gave him no trouble to write. But, that the public might not labour under any mistake and confound him with the common run of authors, he took occasion when writing the prologue to *The Confederacy* in 1705, designed to be spoken "by a Shabby Poet" to stress the fact that he wrote "for praise" only. Other gentlemen poets of his time followed the practice of giving their profits away. In his salad days, George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, wrote a comedy called *The She Gallants* which he for long laid aside, but in after years lent to a friend, seemingly an actor. The friend was quite impressed with the piece, made a few alterations to bring it up to date, and got it produced at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre in 1696. These details are vouchsafed us in Lansdowne's preface to the play, in which he adds, "if his friend has had a Third Day to his Satisfaction, it is all the end that the author propos'd to himself". About a year later, when the anonymous tragi-comedy of *The Triumphs of Virtue* was produced at Drury Lane, the author quite ingeniously strove to ensure the play from the risk of summary condemnation by arranging that Mrs Rogers should speak an epilogue pointing out that he had promised her

all the profits accruing from it; but, as he preserved his anonymity when the play came to be printed, it looks as if his scheme had failed.

Convenient dividing lines as they are in history, centuries merge imperceptibly in life. In the playhouse the eighteenth in order carried on much of the routine that had prevailed in the latter half of its predecessor. But an agreeable surprise awaited at least one non-professional dramatist. Addison cheerfully surrendered to Wilks, Booth, and Cibber, who were in control of Drury Lane, all possible profits in connection with their production of *Cato*,<sup>1</sup> for he had long believed that the play was simply closet drama and would have little appeal to the ordinary playgoer. So far from importuning the triumvirate to put it on the boards, he had to be coaxed by his discerning friends to complete the deferred last act in order that it might be acted. Grateful for the concession, Wilks, Booth, and Cibber spent more money on the mounting of the tragedy than was then usual to lay out on pieces of the sort. Addison was right: closet drama *Cato* really

<sup>1</sup> Which were then the net receipts of the third, sixth and ninth nights of the play's run, and probably amounted in this case to close on £400.

is, but, coming when it did, it chanced to have certain political overtones which constituted it a remarkable *piece de circonstance*, turned the play-house into an arena, and so brought about a more than satisfying success.

In point of record rather than of genius, Aaron Hill was the most notable amateur dramatist of his century. Although he wrote in all nine plays, he never condescended to take a penny for any of them save the last, and then only under the dictates of stern necessity. If La Bruyère was right in maintaining that it is motive alone that gives value to the actions of men, and that disinterestedness puts the cap to it, then Hill was a man of high character. But there was an element of quixotry in his selflessness. Amiable, accomplished, and philanthropic, rendered comfortably off by a second marriage, Hill busied himself throughout life with the pursuit of sundry foreign commercial enterprises with the hope of serving the national weal, but with little material result beyond his own impoverishment. His passion for the drama was shown early in life in a brief spell of theatrical management, followed by his establishing of a theatrical journal called *The Prompter*; and what leisure he could bring himself to snatch from his patriotic speculations was devoted to an

ardent wooing of the muses. In its account of him, the *Biographica Dramatica* takes occasion to remind us that in writing once of dramatic poetry in a preface to one of his plays, he averred that he had "no better reason for wishing it well than his love for a mistress, whom he should never be married to; for that, whenever he grew ambitious, he would wish to build higher, and owe his memory to some occasion of more importance than his writings". Yet, by an irony of circumstance, the fact remains that but for his writings his memory would long since have been swallowed by oblivion. \*

Strange to say, Hill derived pleasure from seeing his work on the stage even when it was not known to the world as his, a peculiarity which inspired curious altruism. In 1721, he was generous enough to relieve his friend Joseph Mitchell's distress by writing for him a short tragedy called *The Fatal Extravagance*, which he got produced at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre as Mitchell's, published it as his, and gave him all the profits. What is remarkable is that, although he disclaimed all desire for theatrical fame, yet he went to extreme lengths to get his plays staged and to ensure their adequate presentation. Unlike the Caroline dilettanti, he never

“gave money with his play”, but he once gave an equivalent. Not content with forgoing all possible profit when his tragedy of *King Henry the Fifth, or The Conquest of France*, was accepted for production at Drury Lane in December 1723, he actually spent £200 in providing it with a new set of scenes.<sup>1</sup> New scenery was not always provided for new plays in those days, and, viewing the fact that Hill’s provision was fated to become part of the Drury Lane stock, his act was a delicate sort of bribery. Later on, he proclaimed his dilettanteism from the housetops. When his tragedy, *Athelwold*, was produced at Drury Lane in 1751, Wilks, in delivering the prologue, was made to say:

Our author’s wishes, partial to the stage,  
Not for himself your favour would engage;  
Not his own cause, but ours he would defend,  
Nor fears an enemy—nor tasks a friend;  
But frankly bids me own that from his plays  
He means no profit, and deserves no praise.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Victor, *History of the Theatres of London and Dublin*, II, p. 122. Hill’s liberality was not without its precedent. On the production of his comedy, *The Six Days’ Adventure, or The New Utopia*, at the Duke’s Theatre in March 1671, the Hon. Edward Howard expended some £300, only to have the mortification of seeing it damned by a faction on its second day. See Montague Summers, *The Playhouse of Pepys*, p. 187.

Little as Hill in his self-deception could have perceived it, this was a striving to obtain success under false pretences. One hears in it an echo of the old, old cry, "Don't damn my play, or you'll injure the poor players". Fate, however, that master ironist, saw to it that Hill should not maintain his attitude of disinterestedness to the end. In ill-health and reduced circumstances when *Merope*, his last play, was produced at Drury Lane in April 1749, he received with thankfulness the £148 which his three benefits brought him in.

When Young's tragedy, *The Brothers*, was in rehearsal for production at Drury Lane in 1753, he caused it to be bruited about that any pecuniary return that accrued from its performance would be given to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, a resolution which moved Garrick to prompt that contemptible little fop, David Mallet, to write an epilogue to the play, making coarse allusion to the author's intention:

A scheme forsooth to benefit the nation,  
Some queer odd whim of pious propagation!  
Lord! talk so *here*—the man must be a widgeon;  
*Drury* may propagate—but not religion.

When Young visited the theatre to see his play a few nights after its production, he was

much shocked and highly offended on hearing Kitty Clive deliver these ribald lines; and, when he came to publish his play, he took good care to omit Mallet's epilogue and substitute an unspoken one of his own in its place.<sup>1</sup> The profits amounted to £400, and Young, in handing them over to the Society whose interests he had so greatly at heart, increased the amount to £1000.

Garrick, in his parsimony, was much too ready to yield to the lure of something for nothing, and found himself duly punished in having to exercise his technical skill in licking a score or more of amorphous plays into shape. In those days, when the number of theatres was strictly limited, the playgoing public was ill-served by this crude amateur supply; but, although the dice continued to be loaded against writers by profession, it was not the unfair rivalry against which they grew clamant in their protests. What rankled in their minds was the eternal iteration of their inferiority. Already, in 1760, considerably before he began to figure as a dramatist, the iron had entered into Goldsmith's soul. Twice in *The Citizen of the World* he gives voice to the grievances of his clan. Contrasting the

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Murphy, *Life of David Garrick* (1801), chapter xi.

fortunes of the rich author and the poor in the fifty-sixth letter, he writes:

The poor devil against whom fashion has set its face, vainly alleges, that he has been bred in every part of Europe where knowledge was to be sold; that he has grown pale in the study of nature and himself; his works may please upon perusal, but his pretensions to fame are entirely disregarded; he is treated like a fiddler, whose music, though liked, is not much praised, because he lives by it; while a gentleman performer, though the most wretched scraper alive, throws the audience into raptures.

In the ninety-second letter he returns vigorously to the assault:

A man here who should write, and honestly confess that he wrote for bread, might as well send his manuscript to fire the baker's oven; not one creature will read him; all must be court-bred poets, or pretend at least to be court-bred, who can expect to please. Should the caitiff fairly avow a design of emptying our pockets and filling his own, every reader would instantly forsake him; even those who write for bread themselves would combine to worry him, perfectly sensible that his attempts only served to take the bread out of their mouths.

And yet this silly prepossession the more amazes me, when I consider, that almost all the excellent productions of wit that have appeared here, were

purely the offspring of necessity: their Drydens, Butlers, Otways, and Farquhars, were all writers for bread.

But these remonstrances were clear infractions of the law forbidding prisoners at the bar from speaking in their own defence. Ridicule of the pretensions of the amateur was the only effective weapon, but it is surprising how seldom it was wielded. One instance, however, recurs to mind. In 1771, Squire Cradock of Gumbley Hall, Leicestershire, having made an adaptation of *Les Scythes* of Voltaire under the name of *Zobeide*, employed Mrs Yates, the actress, as go-between, to exert her persuasions on the London managers with the view to its production. In the event of success, her reward was to be the acting and publishing rights of the tragedy, and, urged by this proffer, she pestered Colman of Covent Garden until, eventually, he produced the play. But, as it was incontinently damned, the lady gained little for her pains. In the following year, Kenrick, in writing his vile attack on Garrick, *Love in the Suds*, made glancing allusion to these circumstances in the couplet:

Though modest Cradock scorns to sell his play,  
But gives the good-for-nothing thing away.

## Chapter XIII

### THE FOLLY OF THE GRAVEDIGGER'S WAISTCOATS

To the veteran playgoer who has turned three score years and ten and is accustomed to indulge in the pleasures of retrospect, nothing is more remarkable than the gradual abrogation during the past forty years of the authority of tradition in the staging of Shakespeare and the classic drama generally. Producers now have a clean sheet. Bits of incidental business which were reverentially preserved by generations of players and more or less happy gags which had come to be incorporated with the texts have all gone by the board. This was inevitable with the decline and fall of the old stock system, for the stock system educated audiences as well as actors, and was nothing if not a cherisher of the traditions. People were taught on both sides of the curtain that there was one immutable way of doing a thing, and there an end. The transition has been from a public well versed in all the old points

and inclined to resent their non-observance to a public which has lost touch with the traditions and goes to the theatre with an open mind.

If in this there has been loss, there has also been gain. On the stage, traditional observance makes in the long-run for stagnation of mind. Many of the old conventions arose from the whim of the moment and few had any fundamental authority. It would not be difficult to show that Shakespeare, in particular, suffered from these encrustations, but one glaring instance will probably suffice. Let me tell now, for the first time in full, the story of the Gravedigger's waistcoats.

In his *Journal*, published in 1817, Louis Sismondi records a visit paid by him to Covent Garden Theatre six years previously to see John Kemble as Hamlet, and how his sense of the fitness of things was utterly outraged in the Grave-yard scene:

After beginning their labour and breaking ground for a grave, a conversation begins between the two Gravediggers. The chief one takes off his coat, folds it carefully, and puts it by in a safe corner; then, taking up his pickaxe, spits in his hand, gives a stroke or two, talks, stops, strips off his waistcoat, still talking, folds it with great deliberation and nicety,

and puts it with the coat; then an under-waistcoat, still talking; and another and another—I counted seven or eight, each folded and unfolded very leisurely in a manner always different, and with gestures faithfully copied from nature. The British public enjoys this scene excessively, but Voltaire, D'Alembert and many other foreign critics agree in reproving this scene of the Gravediggers as horribly low.

Exactly when this extraordinary convention originated it would be difficult to say, but we know that it ruled in the London theatres for another score of years and lingered much longer in the provinces. The value of Sismondi's record lies in the detailed account of the "business" followed in the scene, not in its date, as traces of an earlier observance of the tradition both in town and country are readily to be found. When Stephen Kemble of obese memory (noted for having played Falstaff without stuffing), was seen as the First Gravedigger at the Sunderland Theatre in February 1806, on the occasion of a benefit night, his stripping off of the waistcoats from so elephantine a body, if the local correspondent of *The Monthly Mirror* is to be believed, sent the house into fits of laughter.

Curiously enough, a long time passed before protests began to be made against the continuance

of this ridiculous practice. One "C. G. C." in writing on this score in *The Drama, or Theatrical Pocket Magazine* of June 1823, is none too hopeful of amendment and weakens his case by his humour:

Certainly (he says) "anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing". Ridiculous as the custom may be, it would be almost impossible to abolish it while there are any Gallery guests at the theatre. Bannister excited much dissatisfaction among the refined part of the audience by only divesting himself of two or three previously to commencing his work. I have often heard it remarked that he was not as good a gravedigger as Emery by half a dozen waistcoats.

Although country playgoers can hardly be said to have abounded in those days in taste, even the country critic began to kick. When Macready played Hamlet on the third night of his engagement at the Birmingham Theatre in May 1824, Alfred Bunn, who was the manager of the house, elected to figure as the First Gravedigger, and was well drubbed in the local press for indulging in "the traditional tomfoolery of the twenty-three waistcoats". Possibly that number was not as exaggerated as it sounds. Writing from his personal experience at Newark in 1820, Fred

Belton tells us in his *Random Recollections of an Old Actor* that the low comedian of the Lincoln Circuit contrived, as the Gravedigger, to divest himself of no fewer than twenty-three waistcoats.

In the metropolis a decade later there were signs and portents that the old convention was losing its potency. Leigh Hunt, in criticising a performance of *Hamlet* in *The Tatler* in 1831 expressed his satisfaction on seeing that "the folly of the waistcoats" had, for once, been laid aside. This drew down upon him the wrath of a conservative-minded correspondent, who avowed he was all for the traditions, right or wrong, and gave it as his opinion that the challenged one was distinctively Shakespearean.<sup>1</sup> But the thin edge of the wedge had been inserted, and it only remained for common sense to drive it home. When the young Queen went to Drury Lane on January 26, 1838, to see Charles Kean play *Hamlet*, and was the cynosure of all eyes in a splendid audience, the grave-digging fell to the lot of that excellent dry comedian, Henry Compton, who demonstrated that the character was full-bodied enough to make appeal without the old adventitious aid. Commenting on this fact

<sup>1</sup> Dutton Cook, *On the Stage*, I, p. 239, chapter on "Stage Traditions."

in his diary, Alfred Bunn, who was then lessee of the theatre, said it was literally a great relief "to find the gravedigger omit what was 'a custom more honoured' in the *waistcoat* than the 'observance,'" adding that "they must be bad actors indeed, who resort to such trickeries to achieve a triumph over the language of Shakespeare".<sup>1</sup> Viewing what had happened at Birmingham years previously, one cannot read this without a smile. Measured by his own yardstick, Bunn must have been a bad actor.

Yet, for a good many years both in town and country—and especially in the country—the old comic business in the Graveyard Scene kept cropping up. What liberties could still be taken with a provincial audience about the middle of the century is well illustrated by a story told by Paul Bedford in his *Recollections and Wanderings*, when giving some particulars of a summer tour which he undertook in 1842, in association with Edward Wright, the popular low comedian, at a time when both were prominent members of the Adelphi company:

We finished our second summer tour at the industrious town of Nottingham. On Saturday, the last

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Bunn, *The Stage both Before and Behind the Curtain*, III, pp. 9-10.

night, the performance commenced with *Hamlet*, the Danish prince represented by Professor Tom Lyon. My then friend and fellow-labourer, Edward Wright, enacted the First Gravedigger, and I the Second Gravedigger. The First Digger prepared himself to take the town by storm by having encased his person within a dozen waistcoats of all sorts. My fellow-labourer was astounded at the peals of merriment created by the ceremony of disrobing.<sup>1</sup> Little did he imagine the cause of the mirth, but it was provoked thus: as my chief digger No. 1, relieved himself of the waistcoat garment, the innocent boy-digger No. 2, encased himself in the cast-off vests, which operation created the salvos of laughter, for as No. 1 became thinner and thinner, No. 2 grew fatter and fatter, so when my friend discovered the motive power, he stopped the action and commenced digging Ophelia's grave.

Exactly when this traditional "business" of the waistcoats originated is a fascinating problem. My old friend, Professor Joseph Quincy Adams, approaches it with caution in his *Life of William Shakespeare*<sup>1</sup> and, although he hesitates about saddling the poet with the responsibility, he thinks the "business" is "peculiarly Elizabethan in spirit". Moreover, he goes perilously close to assuming that it was as old as the play, when he says, "Perhaps Shakespeare did not specially

<sup>1</sup> Boston and New York, 1923, pp. 313-4.

concern himself with the way in which the clowns might render the humorous grave-digging episode, yet their comic business must at least have had his approval". But Shakespeare evidently believed with Hamlet that clowns should say no more than is set down for them, and interpolated "business" is a sort of gagging. Fearing lest he should have gone too far, Dr Adams then proceeds to say:

How old this traditional representation of the scene is, we cannot say, but it seems to have gone back at least to the days of Betterton and Davenant. And it was imitated in the Restoration, if not previously in the Elizabethan performances of Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, written with distinct reminiscences of Shakespeare's plays, and acted by the Globe Company about 1611. The 1708 quarto, valuable for the fulness of the stage-directions, notes that in Act v, Scene 2, when the comic doctor removes his gown, he "puts off his four Cloaks one after another."<sup>1</sup> Possibly Anthiny Scoloker was thinking of this farcical representation of the grave-digging episode when in 1603-1604 he cited the play of *Hamlet* as a triumphant example of those tragedies in which the broadly comic and the

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<sup>1</sup> There is a similar absurdity (but one, unlike the others, not devoid of humorous point) in the *Avare* of Molière, in the scene where Harpagon's multiple servant, on the cook being needed, discards several layers of attire until he comes to the cook's dress.

deeply pathetic are placed side by side: "Like friendly Shakespeare's tragedies, where the comedian rides when the tragedian stands on tip-toe".

It is nothing against the supposition that the trick of the waistcoats originated with the tragedy that no hint of any such business being pursued in the scene is to be found in the quarto or the folio, but it seems to me significant that the Commonwealth droll of *The Grave-makers*,<sup>1</sup> which was taken almost bodily from the tragedy, preserves an equal silence on the point. That may not be deemed conclusive, but, as it happens there is documentary evidence extant to show that the undressing "business" cannot have originated before the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Replying to an inquiry of Tate Wilkinson, the veteran country manager, Thomas King, the comedian, wrote to him from London under date "Oct. 12, 1796", as follows:

As to your question—"how I dress the grave-digger?"—I affect no novelty. I follow Yates and other respectable performers whom I have formerly seen. What may have been done in former times, or may be done by mummers of the present day, I am

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<sup>1</sup> First printed in 1662, and now readily to be found in J. J. Elson's recension of *The Wits, or Sport upon Sport* (1932), p. 111.

unable to say, but I have been a member of the Theatres Royal in London and Dublin these seven or eight and forty years, and I never have been present when Shakespeare has been degraded, and the common-sense of an audience insulted, in the way you mention. I could almost wish an actor to be confin'd to the eating bread and cheese for life, who cou'd descend to using them at the grave of Ophelia, and to be divested of his last waistcoat, who cou'd so far violate propriety as to carry so many peelings as an onion, and suppose there cou'd be a merit in taking them off.<sup>1</sup>

After King's clear statement, it would be idle for anybody to maintain that the trick of the waistcoats dated either from Elizabethan or Restoration times. As a matter of fact, it must have been somewhat of a novelty when Tate Wilkinson inquired about it, seeing that although Thomas Davies discusses the Graveyard scene in his chapter on *Hamlet* in his *Dramatic Miscellanies*, published in 1783, and writes appreciatively of the two noted exponents of the First Grave-

<sup>1</sup> This letter was listed (and quoted from, as above) in a London second-hand bookseller's catalogue several years ago, and priced at £10. It comprised the addressed cover and postmark. I made a cutting of the item at the time of issue, and this I still have, but I cannot recall the bookseller's name. Of the genuineness of the letter there can be no doubt.

digger, Cave Underhill and Benjamin Johnson, he makes no reference whatsoever to the disrobing business. Yet he was sternly critical of inappropriate action in the play, and makes objection to the use of miniatures in the Closet Scene.

It is a lucky circumstance that in the early eighteenth century theatre the graveyard scene was not marred by any ultra-farcical action, else Voltaire, who saw *Hamlet* acted during his sojourn in London in 1726, would have had much fuller justification for his condemnation of the introduction of the gravediggers. It was not, alone in French eyes that his strictures on that score proved a true bill. As in France, our own neo-classicists were all for purity of genre and abominated dramatic alloys. There can be little doubt that it was the predominance of Voltaire's authority in our midst which led to Garrick's shocking mutilation of *Hamlet*.<sup>1</sup> Made, as was happily said at the time, "in the true spirit of Bottom the Weaver", Garrick's version of the great tragedy was brought out at Drury Lane on January 18, 1772, and was chiefly remarkable for the entire omission of the Graveyard scene.

<sup>1</sup> See Boaden's *Memoirs of John Philip Kemble*, I, p. 110, where it is spoken of as "this unlucky compliment to Voltaire".

Whether it be indicative of the ill-taste of the times or of the unassailability of Garrick's entrenchment as leader of the stage, the fact remains that this horrible outrage on Shakespeare actually held the stage until after Roscius's death in 1779. It was the version of the play in which Henderson made his first appearance at Drury Lane (but not his first in London), on September 30, 1777. In due course, however, sanity returned. The *Biographia Dramatica* of 1782, in briefly discussing Garrick's maltreatment of the tragedy, records that, "Since the death of the player, the public indeed has vindicated the rights of the poet by starving the theatres into compliance with their wishes to see *Hamlet* as originally meant for exhibition".<sup>1</sup> In such ill-repute had the Garrick version fallen that when John Kemble made his London debut at Drury Lane on September 30, 1783, as the young prince, care was taken to inform the public in the bills that it was the true Shakespearean play in which he was about to appear.

The chances are that it was about this time "the folly of the waistcoats" originated. It may be that some popular low comedian, encouraged by the welcome given to the restored Graveyard

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, p. 144.

scene, deliberately set about embroidering on the First Gravedigger's part. No mere accident could have brought about the creation of the business. Parsons and Dicky Suett were the approved Gravediggers of the hour, but (viewing Tom King's statement on the point and recalling that he was then in London) one hesitates about saddling the responsibility on either. It would look as if the trick had originated in the country and spread.

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